

ANNOUNCER: FUNDING FOR  
"COUNTRY MUSIC" WAS PROVIDED

BY THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS

OF THE BETTER ANGELS SOCIETY:

THE BLAVATNIK FAMILY FOUNDATION,  
THE SCHWARTZ/REISMAN FOUNDATION,  
THE PFEIL FOUNDATION,  
DIANE AND HAL BRIERLEY,  
JOHN AND CATHERINE DEBS,  
THE FULLERTON FAMILY  
CHARITABLE FUND,

BY THE PERRY AND DONNA  
GOLKIN FAMILY FOUNDATION,

JAY ALIX AND UNA JACKMAN,

MERCEDES T. BASS,

AND FRED AND DONNA SEIGEL

AND BY THESE ADDITIONAL MEMBERS.

[BOB WILLIS AND HIS TEXAS  
PLAYBOYS' "NEW SAN ANTONIO  
ROSE" PLAYING]

WILLIS:  
OH, TEAR IT DOWN, MR. MAN.

TEAR IT DOWN NOW.

MAJOR FUNDING WAS PROVIDED  
BY: THE ANNENBERG FOUNDATION;

BY THE ARTHUR VINING DAVIS  
FOUNDATIONS,

DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING  
AMERICA'S FUTURE

THROUGH EDUCATION;

BY BELMONT UNIVERSITY,  
WHERE STUDENTS CAN STUDY

MUSIC AND MUSIC BUSINESS  
IN THE HEART OF MUSIC CITY;

BY THE SOUNDTRACK OF AMERICA--  
MADE IN TENNESSEE--

TRAVEL INFORMATION  
AT TNVACATION.COM;

BY THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT  
OF NASHVILLE

AND DAVIDSON COUNTY;

BY ROSALIND P. WALTER;

BY THE CORPORATION  
FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING;

AND BY VIEWERS LIKE YOU.

THANK YOU.

â HEADING DOWN SOUTH  
TO THE LAND OF THE PINE â

â THUMBING MY WAY INTO  
NORTH CAROLINE â

â STARING UP THE ROAD,  
PRAY TO GOD I SEE HEADLIGHTS â

â SO, ROCK ME, MAMA,  
LIKE A WAGON WHEEL â

â ROCK ME, MAMA,  
ANY WAY YOU FEEL â

â HEY, MAMA, ROCK ME

[CHEERING AND APPLAUSE]

[VASSAR CLEMENTS & NITTY  
GRITTY DIRT BAND PLAYING  
"ORANGE BLOSSOM SPECIAL"]

WOMAN: WHEN I FIRST  
MOVED TO NASHVILLE, I WAS 19.

I WAS TOO YOUNG TO WAIT TABLES,  
SO I GOT A JOB AS A TOUR GUIDE

AT THE COUNTRY MUSIC  
HALL OF FAME.

AND IT TURNED OUT TO BE SUCH  
A BLESSING BECAUSE I GOT--

I GOT TO LISTEN  
TO SO MUCH MUSIC.

ALL DAY, EVERY DAY,  
I GOT TO--

IT WAS MY JOB TO LEARN  
THE HISTORY OF COUNTRY MUSIC.

WE HAD THIS PAINTING IN  
THE MUSEUM CALLED "THE SOURCES  
OF COUNTRY MUSIC," THE LAST  
PAINTING OF THOMAS HART BENTON.

I HAD TO TELL  
PEOPLE ABOUT IT.

I HUNG OUT WITH  
THIS PAINTING A LOT.

LOOKING AT THIS PAINTING  
IS LIKE LOOKING AT AN OLD

FRIEND FOR ME.

SO IT SHOWS THE BARN DANCES,  
IT SHOWS THE RAILROAD,

RIVERBOATS, THE GOSPEL CHOIRS,  
THE LAP DULCIMERS,

AND THE FIDDLES.

AND IT SHOWS THE COWBOYS AND  
THE BANJO COMING FROM AFRICA

AND THE SLAVES, AND HOW  
ALL OF THIS CAME TOGETHER.

IT'S JUST A BEAUTIFUL THING  
TO LOOK AT BECAUSE IT'S THE--

IT'S THE CLOSEST THING,  
VISUALLY, REALLY, TO WHAT

COUNTRY MUSIC SOUNDS LIKE.

IT'S SO COLORFUL. THERE'S  
SO MUCH ENERGY IN IT.

NARRATOR: COUNTRY MUSIC  
ROSE FROM THE BOTTOM UP,

FROM THE SONGS AMERICANS SANG  
TO THEMSELVES IN FARM FIELDS

AND RAILROAD YARDS TO EASE  
THEM THROUGH THEIR LABORS

AND SONGS THEY SANG TO  
EACH OTHER ON THE PORCHES

AND IN THE PARLORS OF  
THEIR HOMES WHEN THE DAY'S

WORK WAS DONE.

IT CAME FROM THE FIDDLE TUNES  
THEY DANCED TO

ON SATURDAY NIGHTS  
TO LET OFF STEAM

AND FROM THE HYMNS THEY CHANTED  
IN CHURCH ON SUNDAY MORNINGS.

IT FILTERED OUT OF SECLUDED  
HOLLOWS DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS

AND FROM SMOKY SALOONS ON THE  
EDGE OF TOWN, FROM THE BARRIOS

ALONG THE SOUTHERN BORDER,  
AND FROM THE WIDE-OPEN SPACES

OF THE WESTERN RANGE.

NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND:  
"OH, I'M THINKIN' TONIGHT  
OF MY BLUE EYES..."

NARRATOR: MOST OF ALL,  
ITS ROOTS SPRANG FROM  
THE NEED OF AMERICANS,

ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO FELT  
LEFT OUT AND LOOKED DOWN UPON,

TO TELL THEIR STORIES.

NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND:  
"...THINKIN' TONIGHT  
OF HIM, ONLY..."

WOMAN: THERE'S SOMETHING  
ABOUT THE LYRICS, TO ME,

THAT JUST SEPARATE IT  
FROM EVERYTHING ELSE...

NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND:  
"...EVER THINKS OF ME

SONGS THAT YOU GO, "THAT  
HAPPENED TO ME YESTERDAY,"

OR, "THAT HAPPENED  
TO ME LAST WEEK,"

OR "I'M GOING THROUGH THAT  
HEARTBREAK RIGHT NOW," YOU KNOW.

WELL, TO ME,  
IT'S SOUL MUSIC.

IT'S PROBABLY  
THE WHITE MAN'S SOUL MUSIC.

AND IT COMES  
FROM THE HEART.

MAN: I BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN GO  
LOOK AND FIND A COUNTRY SONG

TO FIT ANY MOOD YOU'RE IN,

ANY SONG THAT WILL  
HELP YOU FEEL BETTER.

SOMETIME IT MIGHT MAKE YOU  
CRY, BUT YOU'LL FEEL BETTER,

YOU CAN FIND THAT SONG.

THAT'S WHAT I BELIEVE.

LOVIN', CHEATIN', HURTIN',  
FIGHTIN', DRINKIN',

PICKUP TRUCKS,  
AND MOTHER.

YOU ALSO HAVE TO  
HAND IN THERE A FEW

DEATH, MURDER, MAYHEM,  
SUICIDE, YOU KNOW, SONGS,

YOU KNOW, THAT ARE REAL.

DOLLY PARTON: I THINK IT'S  
JUST SIMPLE WAYS OF TELLING

STORIES, EXPERIENCING  
AND EXPRESSING FEELINGS.

YOU CAN DANCE TO IT,  
YOU CAN CRY TO IT,

YOU CAN MAKE LOVE  
TO IT,

YOU CAN PLAY IT AT A FUNERAL,  
YOU CAN--

IT'S JUST REALLY  
HAS SOMETHING

IN IT FOR EVERYBODY,  
AND PEOPLE RELATE TO IT.

NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND:  
"OH, I'M THINKIN' ABOUT...

MAN: IT'S ABOUT THOSE  
THINGS THAT WE BELIEVE IN

BUT WE CAN'T SEE, LIKE  
DREAMS AND SONGS AND SOULS.

THEY'RE HANGING AROUND HERE, AND  
DIFFERENT SONGWRITERS REACH UP

AND GET THEM.

COUNTRY MUSIC COMES  
FROM RIGHT IN HERE,

THIS HEART AND SOUL  
THAT WE ALL HAVE.

IT'S GREAT MUSIC THAT  
REALLY HITS US, BECAUSE  
WE'RE ALL HUMAN.

NARRATOR: "COUNTRY MUSIC,"  
THE SONGWRITER HARLAN HOWARD

SAID, IS "THREE CHORDS  
AND THE TRUTH."

MAN: TRUTH TELLING,  
WHICH COUNTRY MUSIC  
AT ITS BEST IS...

TRUTH TELLING,  
EVEN WHEN IT'S A BIG FAT LIE.

IT'S WHAT AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC  
HAS COME TO BE CALLED

WHEN IT FOLLOWED  
THE PATH OF THE FIDDLE

AND THE BANJO.

ALL OF AMERICAN MUSIC  
COMES FROM THE SAME PLACE.

IT'S JUST SORT OF  
WHERE IT ENDS UP,

AND COUNTRY MUSIC IS ONE  
OF THE DESTINATIONS.

[SECOR PLAYING  
FAST TUNE ON VIOLIN]

â

â OOOOOOOHH

YEAH!

AH!

â WHOOOOOOO

YEAH!

COUNTRY.

["FIDDLIN' JOHN" CARSON'S  
"OLD AND IN THE WAY" PLAYING]

â

NARRATOR: BY THE EARLY 1920s,

A GEORGIA FACTORY WORKER  
NAMED JOHN CARSON HAD

BEEN PLAYING THE FIDDLE FOR  
NEARLY 40 YEARS, EVER SINCE HIS

GRANDFATHER FIRST GAVE  
HIM ONE AT AGE 10.

ALTHOUGH MUSIC WAS HIS  
PASSION, HE HAD TO SUPPORT HIS

GROWING FAMILY WORKING IN  
ONE OF ATLANTA'S TEXTILE MILLS,

MAKING \$10 A WEEK  
FOR 60 HOURS OF LABOR.

[STEAM WHISTLE BLOWS]

BUT ON SATURDAY NIGHTS, IN THE  
CROWDED FACTORY NEIGHBORHOODS,

CARSON AND HIS FRIENDS STARTED  
TO MAKE A LITTLE EXTRA MONEY

PLAYING AT SQUARE DANCES FOR

FAMILIES WHO HAD MIGRATED FROM  
THEIR FARMS TO ATLANTA,  
NOW ONE OF THE SOUTH'S  
BIGGEST CITIES.

"FIDDLIN' JOHN" CARSON:  
"NOW, I AIN'T GOT NO MONEY

"GOT NOWHERE TO STAY...

NARRATOR: "FIDDLIN' JOHN" CARSON  
SOON BEGAN APPEARING WHEREVER

AN AUDIENCE COULD BE  
FOUND--STORE OPENINGS  
AND FARM AUCTIONS,

CONFEDERATE  
VETERANS' REUNIONS,

AND POLITICAL EVENTS RANGING  
FROM KU KLUX KLAN GATHERINGS

TO A RALLY IN SUPPORT OF  
A COMMUNIST ORGANIZER.

AT THE GEORGIA OLD-TIME  
FIDDLERS' CONVENTION, CARSON

FOUND HIS BIGGEST AUDIENCES.

[PLAYING "TURKEY IN THE STRAW"]

EACH YEAR, SEVERAL THOUSAND  
PEOPLE CAME TO HEAR MUSIC THAT

REMINDED THEM OF SIMPLER  
TIMES AND THE RURAL HOMES

OF THEIR PAST.

MAN: GOING TO A DANCE WAS  
SORT OF LIKE GOING BACK HOME

TO MAMA'S OR TO  
GRANDMA'S FOR THANKSGIVING.

COUNTRY MUSIC IS FULL OF SONGS  
ABOUT LITTLE OLD LOG CABINS

THAT PEOPLE HAVE NEVER LIVED IN,  
THE OLD COUNTRY CHURCH

THAT PEOPLE HAVE  
NEVER ATTENDED.



BUT IT SPOKE FOR A LOT PEOPLE  
WHO WERE BEING FORGOTTEN

OR FELT THEY WERE  
BEING FORGOTTEN.

COUNTRY MUSIC'S STAPLE,  
ABOVE ALL, IS NOSTALGIA.

JUST A HARKENING BACK TO THE  
OLDER WAY OF LIFE, EITHER REAL

OR IMAGINED.

MAN: WELL, ALL RIGHT!

NARRATOR: IN 1922, CARSON'S  
AUDIENCE EXPANDED AGAIN

THANKS TO A NEW TECHNOLOGY.

THE "ATLANTA JOURNAL" BEGAN  
OPERATING THE SOUTH'S FIRST

RADIO STATION, WHOSE  
CALL LETTERS WSB STOOD

FOR "WELCOME SOUTH, BROTHER."

CARSON: "â€¦IS THE MAN  
THAT FEEDS 'EM ALL â€¦"

MAN: ANYONE WHO COULD SING,  
WHISTLE, RECITE, PLAY ANY KIND

OF INSTRUMENT, OR MERELY  
BREATHE HEAVILY WAS PUSHED

IN FRONT OF  
THE WSB MICROPHONE.

NONE OF THE TALENT WAS PAID,  
BUT THAT MADE NO DIFFERENCE.

THEY TROUPED TO WSB TO  
PERFORM, AND AUNT MINNIE

STAYED HOME TO LISTEN.

NARRATOR: THE RADIO EXPOSURE  
BROUGHT CARSON INVITATIONS TO

PLAY AT PAID PERFORMANCES

IN COUNTRY  
SCHOOLHOUSES

AND SMALL-TOWN  
THEATERS

THROUGHOUT  
THE REGION.

MAN: UNTIL I BEGAN  
TO PLAY OVER WSB,

JUST A FEW PEOPLE IN  
AND AROUND ATLANTA KNEW ME.

BUT NOW MY WIFE THINKS SHE'S  
A WIDOW MOST OF THE TIME

BECAUSE I STAY AWAY FROM HOME  
SO MUCH PLAYING AROUND OVER

THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY.

RADIO MADE ME.

NARRATOR:  
BUT AN OLDER TECHNOLOGY

WOULD NOW BRING CARSON  
AND HIS KIND OF MUSIC

TO EVEN MORE PEOPLE.

EVER SINCE THOMAS EDISON'S  
INVENTION OF THE PHONOGRAPH,

AMERICANS HAD BEEN BUYING  
THE MACHINES FOR THEIR HOMES.

MOST OF THE MUSIC AVAILABLE  
TO THEM WAS BY "HIGH-BROW"

ARTISTS LIKE  
OPERA TENOR ENRICO CARUSO.

[CARUSO SINGING IN ITALIAN]

THEN, IN THE SUMMER OF 1923,  
A YOUNG MAN FROM MISSOURI

NAMED RALPH PEER  
WOULD CHANGE ALL THAT.

MAN: YOU COULDN'T POSSIBLY BE  
A SUCCESS--AT LEAST, IT WOULD

BE UNUSUAL TO BE A SUCCESS--IF  
YOU KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT MUSIC.

YOU HAVE TO BE A BUSINESSMAN  
AND A PROPHET, AND YOU ALSO

HAVE TO BE  
SOMEWHAT OF A GAMBLER.

NARRATOR: BY AGE 31,  
RALPH PEER HAD RISEN THROUGH  
THE RANKS OF THE NEW GENERAL  
PHONOGRAPH COMPANY, WHICH HAD  
CARVED OUT A NICHE  
WITH RECORDS AIMED AT AMERICA'S  
IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS.

ITALIAN, GERMAN, RUSSIAN,  
SCANDINAVIAN, POLISH, GREEK,

TURKISH, YIDDISH,  
SLOVAKIAN, LITHUANIAN,  
AND CHINESE HOUSEHOLDS

ALL COULD BUY MUSIC RECORDED  
IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGES.

IN 1920,  
PEER HAD DISCOVERED ANOTHER  
UNTAPPED NICHE IN THE MARKET.

WOMAN: "I CAN'T  
SLEEP AT NIGHT..."

NARRATOR:  
WITH THE COMPANY'S OKEH LABEL,  
HE RECORDED VAUDEVILLE SINGER

MAMIE SMITH'S "CRAZY BLUES,"  
THE FIRST RECORDING

AIMED AT A BLACK AUDIENCE.

IT SOLD 75,000 COPIES  
IN ITS FIRST MONTH.

SEEKING MORE BLACK MUSICIANS  
FOR WHAT THE LABEL NOW CALLED

ITS "RACE" RECORDS, IN JUNE  
OF 1923, PEER BROUGHT OKEH'S

ENGINEERS TO ATLANTA.

BUT AFTER RECORDING TWO FEMALE  
BLUES SINGERS AND A QUARTET

FROM MOREHOUSE COLLEGE, HE WAS  
INTRODUCED TO RADIO STATION

WSB'S NEW CELEBRITY,  
"FIDDLIN' JOHN" CARSON.

PEER WAS RELUCTANT TO RECORD  
CARSON AT FIRST, UNCERTAIN

A MARKET EVEN EXISTED  
FOR OLD-TIME MUSIC.

A YEAR EARLIER, TEXAS FIDDLER  
ECK ROBERTSON HAD RECORDED TWO

SONGS FOR THE POWERFUL  
VICTOR TALKING MACHINE COMPANY,

BUT THEY HAD NOT SOLD WELL.

RALPH PEER DECIDED TO TAKE  
A CHANCE ON "FIDDLIN' JOHN."

HE RECORDED CARSON PLAYING AN  
OLD MINSTREL SONG, "THE LITTLE

OLD LOG CABIN IN THE LANE,"  
ROMANTICIZING SLAVE LIFE.

SECOR: "FIDDLIN' JOHN" CARSON  
COMES UP TO THE MICROPHONE,

AND HE GRABS HIS FIDDLE,  
AND HE BUSTS RIGHT INTO

A TUNE THAT HE'S  
KNOWN ALL HIS LIFE.

[SINGING TO CARSON'S RECORD]

â OH, I'M GETTING  
OLD AND FEEBLE â

â AND I CANNOT WORK NO MORE

[CARSON'S VOICE FADES OUT]

â MY RUSTY BLADED HOE  
I'VE LAID TO REST â

â OH, MASTER AND THE MISTRESS  
ARE LAYING SIDE BY SIDE â

â THEIR SPIRITS NOW ARE  
ROAMING IN THE WEST â

CARSON: â ...HAVE CHANGED  
ABOUT THE PLACE NOW â

â AND IN DARKNESS  
THEY HAVE GONE â

â TO ANOTHER YEAR AND  
SINGING IN THE CANE... â

NARRATOR: IN ATLANTA, THE  
RECORDS SOLD LIKE HOT CAKES.

CARSON: â ...LEFT HERE IS THAT  
GOOD OL' DOG OF MINE â

â AND THE LITTLE OLD  
LOG CABIN IN THE LANE â

NARRATOR: PEER REALIZED  
THAT THERE WAS ANOTHER  
SEGMENT OF AMERICA,

PREDOMINANTLY WHITE,  
WORKING-CLASS SOUTHERNERS,

EAGER TO BUY RECORDINGS OF MUSIC  
THEY WERE FAMILIAR WITH.

CARSON: â BUT THERE'S  
ANGELS WATCHING... â

NARRATOR: RALPH PEER  
BEGAN LOOKING FOR OTHER  
ARTISTS LIKE "FIDDLIN' JOHN"

AND SOON PROCLAIMED IN  
AN ADVERTISEMENT THAT OKEH HAD

"UNCOVERED A BRAND-NEW FIELD  
FOR RECORD SALES" AND OFFERED

"OLD TIME PIECES" THAT WERE  
SETTING OFF, HE SAID,

A CRAZE FOR THIS  
"HILL COUNTRY MUSIC."

CARSON: â ...CABIN IN THE LANE

[BIRDS CHIRPING]

MAN: "THE PHONOGRAPH COMPANIES  
HAVE OPENED A NEW MARKET,

"ONE THAT THEY HAD NOT  
DREAMED EXISTED:

"A WIDE MARKET AMONG  
THE FOLK OF THE MOUNTAINS,

"OF THE MINING DISTRICTS  
AND THE TIMBERLANDS.

"PLAIN FOLK TO WHOM THE STORY IS  
THE IMPORTANT PART OF ANY SONG,

"WHO LIKE THE  
ACCOMPANIMENT SIMPLE

AND THE WORDS UNDERSTANDABLE."

"COLLIER'S" MAGAZINE.

WOMAN: COUNTRY MUSIC

IS THE MUSIC OF THE WORKING  
CLASS, IS THE MUSIC OF PEOPLE

WHO DON'T HAVE A LOT OF POWER.

WE LIKE TO TALK ABOUT  
THE FOUNDING FATHERS A LOT,

BUT THE PEOPLE WHO BUILT THIS  
COUNTRY, THAT'S THE PEOPLE

WHERE COUNTRY  
AND BLUES COME FROM,

YOU KNOW, ARE THOSE PEOPLE.

AND YOU DON'T HAVE  
AMERICA WITHOUT THEM.

BRADLEY KINCAID: "IN  
SCARLET TOWN WHERE I WAS BORN "

" THERE WAS  
A FAIR MAID DWELLIN' "

" MADE EVERY YOUTH  
CRY WELL AWAY "

" HER NAME WAS  
BARBAR'Y ALLEN... "

NARRATOR: RALPH PEER

MAY HAVE DISCOVERED A NEW  
FIELD FOR RECORD SALES

IN THE 1920s, BUT THE MUSIC  
ITSELF WAS ANYTHING BUT NEW.

KINCAID: " SWEET WILLIAM ON  
HIS DEATHBED LAY... "

NARRATOR: IT SPRANG FROM MANY  
SOURCES, SOME OF THEM OLDER THAN

THE NATION ITSELF.

THE FIRST COLONISTS BROUGHT  
WITH THEM BALLADS FROM

THE BRITISH ISLES THAT WERE  
ALREADY CENTURIES OLD--

SONGS THAT TOLD STORIES,  
OFTEN OF LOST LOVES, MURDERS,

OR TRAGIC EVENTS.

SOME WERE PASSED ALONG IN THE  
NEW WORLD RELATIVELY UNCHANGED

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.

"BARBARA ALLEN," THE PLAINTIVE  
STORY OF AN UNREQUITED LOVE,

A BROKEN HEART, AND TWO DEATHS,

DATED ALL THE WAY BACK  
TO THE 1600s.

IT WAS NEARLY 300 YEARS OLD  
WHEN BRADLEY KINCAID, WHO HAD

LEARNED IT FROM HIS UNCLE  
IN KENTUCKY, FIRST SANG IT

ON THE RADIO.

PARTON: "A PRETTY FAIR MISS  
OUT IN THE GARDEN "A

"A WHEN A SOLDIER BOY...

I GREW UP IN THE GREAT SMOKY  
MOUNTAINS OF EAST TENNESSEE.

MY MOTHER WAS A GREAT SINGER!

SHE HAD ONE OF THOSE  
OLD MOUNTAIN VOICES.

SHE USED TO SING ALL THOSE  
SONGS FROM THE OLD WORLD--

"BARBARA ALLEN," "BENEATH  
THE WEEPING WILLOW TREE."

SHE SAID THAT'S HOW PEOPLE  
USED TO CARRY THE NEWS,

WHEN THEY BROUGHT THOSE OLD  
SONGS OVER FROM THE OLD WORLD--

THOSE OLD IRISH, ENGLISH,  
SCOTTISH, WELSH BALLADS.

SHE TOLD A GREAT STORY,  
AND IT WAS ALL BELIEVABLE.

SO JUST WATCHING MAMA WAS LIKE  
WATCHING TV, HEARING HER SING

AND TELL ALL THESE STORIES.

“... FOR SEVEN LONG YEARS  
HE'S BEEN IN THE WAR”

“NO MAN ON EARTH  
I NEVER SHALL MARRY”

“IF HE SHOULD STAY THERE  
SEVEN YEARS MORE”

I GOT TO FINISH IT.

“HE TOOK HIS HANDS BOTH  
OUT OF HIS POCKET”

“HIS FINGERS WERE BOTH  
NEAT AND SMALL”

“AND ON HIS HAND WAS  
THE RING SHE GAVE HIM”

“STRAIGHT WAY BEFORE  
HIM SHE DID FALL”

NARRATOR: FOR GENERATIONS,

AMERICANS HAD ALSO BEEN ADAPTING  
MELODIES FROM THE OLD WORLD

BY ATTACHING NEW LYRICS  
TO MATCH THEIR EXPERIENCES

IN THE NEW WORLD.

"BURY ME NOT ON THE LONE  
PRAIRIE" CAME FROM AN OLD

SAILOR'S SONG,  
"THE OCEAN BURIAL."

"THE STREETS OF LAREDO" TOOK



ITS TUNE FROM AN IRISH BALLAD

WRITTEN AROUND 1700,  
"THE BARD OF ARMAGH."

BRADLEY: WE TOOK THAT  
MELODY, AND WE WROTE

ABOUT GUN FIGHTERS  
GETTIN' KILLED.

WE DIDN'T INVENT  
COUNTRY MUSIC,

AND I DON'T WANNA  
SAY WE STOLE IT.

THAT'S A PRETTY STRONG WORD.

BUT I WILL SAY THAT WE  
ADAPTED IT FROM THE ENGLISH,

THE IRISH,  
AND THE SCOTTISH PEOPLE.

TENNESSEE MOUNTAINEERS:  
â STANDING ON THE PROMISES  
OF CHRIST MY KING â

â THROUGH ETERNAL AGES...

NARRATOR: NOWHERE WAS MUSIC  
MORE ESSENTIAL THAN IN CHURCH.

THE HYMNS PEOPLE SANG ON  
SUNDAY MORNINGS WARNED THEM

OF GOD'S ETERNAL JUDGMENT,  
BUT ALSO OFFERED THE PROMISE

OF SALVATION, EVEN TO  
THE SINNERS WHO HAD BEEN OUT

CAROUSING SATURDAY NIGHT.

MAN: THE BEST CHRISTIAN  
IN THE WORLD IS THE ONE WHO

REALIZES THAT HE NEEDS TO BE.

YOU KNOW, YOU'VE GOT TO  
EXPERIENCE SATURDAY NIGHT

SOMETIMES TO KNOW WHAT  
SUNDAY MORNING'S ALL ABOUT.

[GLASS BREAKS]

MAN: HUMAN BEINGS,  
WHAT DO WE THINK ABOUT?

WE GOT VERY BASIC THINGS.

WE THINK ABOUT OUR SEXUAL  
RELATIONSHIP, THAT WE NEED TO

PROPAGATE OUR SPECIES THAT  
MAKES OUR LIFE SWEET AND ALSO

BITTER, AND OUR RELATIONSHIP  
TO WHATEVER OUR LORD IS.

SO, WE PUT THOSE TWO  
THINGS RIGHT TOGETHER.

THE SATURDAY NIGHT FUNCTION

AND THE SUNDAY MORNING  
PURIFICATION.

AND YOU GOT TO GET PURIFIED  
ON SUNDAY SO YOU CAN DO

THE SAME THING AGAIN  
NEXT SATURDAY.

COME ON, NOW.

[BELL TOLLING]

MAN: WELL, I WENT TO  
THE OLD "PRIMITIVE" BAPTIST,

WHERE THEY ALL GET UP TOGETHER  
AND SING THE SAME PART,

NO MUSIC, OR NOTHING.

EVERYBODY SUNG LEAD.

[PEOPLE SINGING]

THAT'S THE WAY IT WAS  
IN THE OLD BAPTIST SOUND.

SOMEONE WOULD LEAD THE SONG,  
AND GIVE IT OUT.

YOU CALL IT "LINING." YOU SAY,  
"TARRY WITH ME, OH, MY SAVIOR."

THEN YOU'D...

â TARRY WITH ME,

OH, MY SAVIOR

AND THEY'D KNOW WHAT TO DO.

[THE FAIRFAX STREET CHOIR  
SINGING "WILL THE CIRCLE  
BE UNBROKEN?"]

NARRATOR: MOST PEOPLE COULDN'T  
READ MUSIC, SO SINGING SCHOOLS

WERE ORGANIZED TO TEACH THEM  
A BASIC SYSTEM CALLED

SHAPE NOTES.

SONGBOOK PUBLISHERS DISPATCHED  
TRAVELING QUARTETS TO

DEMONSTRATE HOW TO ADD HARMONY  
TO THE SONGS, AND THEN SELL

THEIR PRODUCTS.

PEOPLE CONGREGATED  
AT SINGING CONVENTIONS

AND GOSPEL TENT REVIVALS,  
WHERE THEY SANG OLD SPIRITUALS

BORN IN BLACK CHURCHES

OR POPULAR HYMNS LIKE  
"WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN?"

AND A CHEERY GOSPEL TUNE,  
"KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE,"

INSPIRED BY THE WRITER'S  
INVALID COUSIN WHO ASKED THAT

HIS WHEELCHAIR ALWAYS BE  
PUSHED "ON THE SUNNY SIDE"

OF THE STREET.

SOMETIMES, REVIVAL ORGANIZERS  
SIMPLY SET RELIGIOUS LYRICS TO

POPULAR MELODIES  
EVERYONE ALREADY KNEW.

"WHY," THE SAYING WENT,  
"SHOULD THE DEVIL HAVE ALL

THE GOOD TUNES?"

FAIRFAX STREET CHOIR:  
â€”a ...THE SKY

[TAPPING FOOT]  
â€”a ONE GLAD MORNING,  
WHEN THIS DAY IS OVER â€”a

â€”a I'LL FLY AWAY

â€”a TO A HOME THAT'S,  
DAH, DAH, DAH, DAH â€”a

â€”a I'LL FLY AWAY

THEN YOU GO...

â€”a I'LL FLY AWAY, OH, GLORY

â€”a I'LL FLY AWAY  
IN THE MORNING â€”a

â€”a WHEN I DIE,  
HALLELUJAH, BY AND BY â€”a

â€”a I'LL FLY AWAY

THAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD.

YOU CAN HAVE A HIP HURTING,  
YOU CAN HAVE ARTHRITIS,

YOU CAN HAVE  
ANYTHING WRONG WITH YOU,

BUT, AGAIN, IF YOU  
CAN SING THAT SONG,

YOU'RE GONNA FEEL BETTER.

[2nd SOUTH CAROLINA STRING BAND  
PLAYING "HAWKS AND EAGLES"]

JAZZ EMPHASIZES THIS,  
AND BLUES EMPHASIZES THIS,

AND COUNTRY EMPHASIZES  
THIS, YOU KNOW,

BUT WHERE THEY ALL START IS IN  
THIS BEAUTIFUL SORT OF BOILING

AMERICAN MUSIC POT.

â€”a

â€”a

NARRATOR: THE INSTRUMENTS  
PEOPLE PLAYED CAME FROM EVERY  
CORNER OF THE GLOBE.

FIDDLES WERE THE MOST COMMON,  
HAVING BEEN BROUGHT TO AMERICA  
BY SUCCESSIVE  
WAVES OF IMMIGRANTS.

THE FIRST KNOWN FIDDLE CONTEST  
IN NORTH AMERICA WAS

ADVERTISED IN VIRGINIA  
IN 1736, 40 YEARS BEFORE

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

MAN: THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN A FIDDLE AND A VIOLIN.

I WENT TO SEE ITZHAK PERLMAN  
AT THE OPRY HOUSE

IN NASHVILLE.

AND SOMEBODY TOOK ME  
BACKSTAGE BEFORE THE SHOW.

AND I SAID, "HI, MR. PERLMAN.  
I'M CHARLIE DANIELS.

I AM A FIDDLE PLAYER."

HE SAID, "WE ARE ALL  
FIDDLE PLAYERS."

SO, IF ITZHAK PERLMAN IS  
A FIDDLE PLAYER, I'M PROUD TO BE

ASSOCIATED WITH THE FIDDLE.

[PLAYING "THE LITTLE OLD  
LOG CABIN IN THE LANE"]

â MY OLD MISSUS AND MY MASTER  
WAS SLEEPIN' SIDE BY SIDE â

â IN THAT LITTLE LOG CABIN  
DOWN THE LANE... â

[PLAYING SAME TUNE]

NARRATOR: THE BANJO,  
SECOND ONLY TO THE FIDDLE

EARLY ON, CAME TO AMERICA AS

A GOURD WITH A FRETLESS NECK,  
BROUGHT BY SLAVES FROM AFRICA.

IT'S A DRUM.  
YOU KNOW, IT'S...

THIS THING  
CAME FROM AFRICA.

THIS THING IS PART OF  
A LONG TRADITION.

THEY'VE GOT HIEROGLYPHICS OF  
THESE AT THE PYRAMIDS IN GIZA.

GIDDENS: IT'S AMERICA...

BUT IT'S GOT AFRICA IN IT.

["MY OLD KENTUCKY HOME,  
GOODNIGHT" PLAYING]

NARRATOR: THE BANJO  
EVENTUALLY BECAME

THE INSTRUMENT OF CHOICE FOR  
MANY MUSICIANS

IN THE 19th CENTURY.

MAN: THERE'S SOMETHING  
MYSTERIOUS ABOUT THE SOUND

OF A 5-STRING BANJO  
OR EVEN A 4-STRING BANJO.

IT DOESN'T MAKE YOU SAD.  
IT MAKES YOU FEEL BETTER.

THE BANJO IS A SOUND  
THAT CAPTURES PEOPLE.

IT'S HARD TO IGNORE  
BECAUSE IT'S SO PERCUSSIVE.

NARRATOR: BY THE 1920s,  
CHARLIE POOLE, A TEXTILE

WORKER FROM EDEN,  
NORTH CAROLINA, HAD BECOME

THE BEST-KNOWN BANJO PLAYER  
IN THE NATION.

HE HAD BROKEN SEVERAL FINGERS

PLAYING BASEBALL, RESULTING

IN A PERMANENTLY CURLED  
RIGHT HAND THAT FORCED HIM TO

DEVELOP A UNIQUE,  
3-FINGERED STYLE,

BUT MOST MUSICIANS STILL  
PREFERRED THE "CLAWHAMMER"

OR "FRAILING" METHOD.

SECOR: SO I PLAY IT IN  
THE CLAWHAMMER STYLE.

SO WHEN THE MINSTREL  
CAME TO TOWN, HE WOULD...

[PLAYING FAST, UPBEAT TUNE]

â<sup>a</sup>

â<sup>a</sup>

IT'S THAT KIND OF  
ROLLICKING, FAST-PACED,

YOU KNOW, TRAIN WHISTLE  
KIND OF STUFF.

NARRATOR: IN THE MID-1800s,

ANOTHER INSTRUMENT  
HAD GAINED POPULARITY.

CHRISTIAN FREDERICK MARTIN  
IMMIGRATED TO NEW YORK FROM

GERMANY AND STARTED PRODUCING  
SMALL GUT-STRING GUITARS,

WHOSE LIGHT SOUND  
MADE THEM APPROPRIATE

FOR THE INSTRUMENT'S  
MAIN MARKET AT THE TIME:

POLITE PARLOR MUSIC.

THEN BLACK, HAWAIIAN, AND LATINO  
MUSICIANS ADAPTED IT TO

MORE DIVERSE STYLES, AND WHEN  
MARTIN'S GRANDSON DESIGNED

A NEW MODEL IN

THE EARLY 20th CENTURY,  
WITH A LARGER BODY AND STRONGER  
NECK TO PERMIT STEEL STRINGS,  
THE GUITAR BEGAN TO RIVAL  
THE FIDDLE AND BANJO IN ITS USE.

["KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE"  
PLAYING]

â

ORVILLE GIBSON OF KALAMAZOO,  
MICHIGAN, MADE GUITARS, TOO,  
AND INNOVATED WITH THE DESIGN  
OF ANOTHER INSTRUMENT  
FROM EUROPE: THE MANDOLIN.

ONE OF THE THINGS  
ABOUT GUITARS, MANDOLINS,  
AND BANJOS THAT MADE THEM  
POPULAR IS YOU COULD

HEAR THEM.

YOU COULD HEAR  
A FIDDLE FROM FAR AWAY.

YOU COULD HEAR THE CHORDS  
OF THE GUITAR AND YOU  
COULD HEAR THE BANJO.

ANOTHER THING IS  
YOU COULD CARRY THEM WITH YOU.

YOU COULD PUT IT  
OVER YOUR BACK.

YOU COULD TIE IT TO YOUR HORSE.

YOU COULD BRING IT ALONG,

AND YOU COULD  
TAKE IT ANYWHERE.

THE PIANO, NOT SO MUCH.

[SHIP'S HORN BLOWS]

NARRATOR: NOT ALL OF THE MUSIC  
PEOPLE CONSIDERED "OLD-TIME"

WAS ACTUALLY ROOTED IN



THE DEEP PAST, NOR DID IT SPRING

EXCLUSIVELY FROM  
THE RURAL SOUTH.

LONG BEFORE PHONOGRAPHS  
AND RADIO, TRAVELING SHOWS HAD

CRISSCROSSED THE COUNTRY,  
FEATURING MUSIC BY

PROFESSIONAL SONGWRITERS  
FROM THE CITIES.

BEGINNING IN THE 1840s,  
STEPHEN FOSTER CREATED

A STRING OF HEARTFELT SONGS,  
LIKE "BEAUTIFUL DREAMER"

AND "HARD TIMES,"

THAT ENDED UP

IN THE PARLORS OF HOMES

ACROSS THE NATION.

THOUGH HE WAS A NORTHERNER WHO  
TRAVELED ONLY ONCE BELOW

THE MASON-DIXON LINE, FOSTER  
ALSO CONTRIBUTED TUNES THAT WERE

SPREAD BY ITINERANT MINSTREL  
SHOWS--WHITE PROFESSIONAL

MUSICIANS DRESSED IN  
BLACKFACE, WHO DANCED

AND PERFORMED SONGS THAT  
AUDIENCES BELIEVED

IMITATED AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
MUSIC AND SENTIMENTALIZED LIFE

IN THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH...

JOHN PRINE: "OH, THE SUN  
SHINES BRIGHT..."

NARRATOR: "CAMPTOWN RACES,"  
"MY OLD KENTUCKY HOME,"

"OLD FOLKS AT HOME."

PRINE: "'TIS SUMMER,

THE OLD FOLKS ARE GAY... â€â€â€

SECOR: IT'S A LOT OF NOSTALGIA.

IN MINSTRELSY, THEY SELL THIS  
VERSION OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

LIKE "DARKIES  
PRAISING THEIR MASTERS."

OLD UNCLE TOM, WHO WISHES HE  
WAS BACK HOME IN THE OLD SOUTH.

GIDDENS: THAT'S ALWAYS BEEN  
SO INTERESTING TO ME,

THE FASCINATION THAT  
WHITE CULTURES HERE HAVE HAD

WITH BLACK CULTURE.

ON THE ONE HAND, IT'S LIKE  
THE LANGUAGE THAT IS USED

IS SO NEGATIVE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS  
JUST, LIKE, "BUT THE MUSIC!

"BUT THE DANCE!

IT'S SO COOL."

PRINE: â€â€â€ ON MY OLD  
KENTUCKY HOME... â€â€â€

NARRATOR: THE ONLY SOURCE  
OF INCOME FOR A PROFESSIONAL

SONGWRITER LIKE FOSTER WAS  
THE ROYALTIES FROM SALES

OF SHEET MUSIC.

HIS SONGS WERE IMMENSELY  
POPULAR, BUT BECAUSE OF LAX

COPYRIGHT LAWS, WHEN HE  
DIED IN NEW YORK CITY'S  
BELLEVUE HOSPITAL

IN 1864 AT AGE 37,  
FOSTER WAS VIRTUALLY PENNILESS.

MANY OTHER SONGS CONSIDERED  
QUINTESSENTIALLY SOUTHERN

AND RURAL, IN FACT, CAME  
FROM NORTHERN, URBAN SOURCES.

"CARRY ME BACK TO  
OLD VIRGINNY," WAS WRITTEN

BY JAMES A. BLAND,

A COLLEGE-EDUCATED  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN

BORN IN FLUSHING, NEW YORK.

"DIXIE," PLAYED AT

THE INAUGURATION

OF JEFFERSON DAVIS  
IN ALABAMA, WAS CREDITED TO

DANIEL DECATUR EMMETT OF OHIO.

MAN: "I'M IN LOVE..."

NARRATOR: BY THE 1920s,

AS MINSTREL SHOWS  
WERE FADING, RALPH PEER  
RECORDED EMMETT MILLER,

STILL APPEARING IN BLACKFACE,  
SINGING "LOVESICK BLUES,"

TO WHICH HE ADDED  
A DISTINCTIVE YODELING BREAK.

MILLER: "...GOT A FEELING  
CALLED THE BLUE-HOO-HOO-HOOS"

"AS MY MAMA SAID GOOD-BYE..."

NARRATOR: LIKE SO MUCH  
OTHER MUSIC OF THE TIME,  
IT DREW DEEPLY FROM

SO-CALLED "RACE" MUSIC, EVEN  
IF THAT MUSIC WAS PERFORMED

ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY BY WHITES,  
MOST OF THEM SOUTHERNERS.

MILLER: "THAT LAST  
LONG DAY WE..."

THE SOUTH ITSELF IS A PLACE OF  
BLACK AND WHITE SOUTHERNERS.

I MEAN, IT'S--THERE'S  
NO "WHITE" SOUTH.

IT'S NOT SCANDINAVIAN.

IT IS A PLACE WHERE BLACK  
AND WHITE PEOPLE LIVE,

CHEEK BY JOWL,  
AS WE SAY.

AND THE INFLUENCES GO  
BACK AND FORWARD.

MARSALIS: YOU HAVE  
THE CULTURES COMING TOGETHER.

AND WHENEVER YOU HAVE THESE

CONTRADICTIONS  
TOGETHER IN THE SOUTH,

YOU HAVE A LOT OF THE OPPOSITES  
THAT CREATE A RICHNESS.

SECOR: I THINK THAT FRICTION  
IS A GOOD WAY

TO LOOK AT THE MUSIC.

BECAUSE OF THIS RUB BETWEEN  
WHITE AND BLACK, COUNTRY MUSIC

COMES FROM THE SOUTH  
BECAUSE THIS IS WHERE

SLAVERY HAPPENED.

MILLER: â€ NOW IT'S AWFUL  
WHEN YOU'RE... â€

GIDDENS: THE RUB  
IS PEOPLE MIXING.

IT STARTS GOING BACK AND FORTH,  
AND IT BECOMES THIS BEAUTIFUL

MIX OF CULTURES.

THEY MET AND MINGLED,  
AND BECAME THIS EDGE,

BUT THE HEART SPOKE  
MUSICALLY TO EACH OTHER.

AND THEN SOMEBODY  
FROM UP HERE SAYS,

"OH, WE CAN'T HAVE THAT.

YOU GUYS CAN'T BE  
DOING STUFF TOGETHER."

THAT'S WHAT THE RUB IS.

[GUS CANNON'S  
"VIOLA LEE BLUES" PLAYING]

NARRATOR: BY THE 1920s,

SLAVERY HAD BEEN ABOLISHED  
FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY,

BUT SEGREGATION WAS STILL  
RIGIDLY ENFORCED

IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE,

EXCEPT IN THE MUSIC THAT  
KEPT CROSSING THE RACIAL DIVIDE.

CANNON:  
â€”a ...DOWN INDEED-E...

SECOR: THROUGH THE AGES,  
BLACKS IMITATING WHITES

IMITATING BLACKS  
IMITATING WHITES.

YOU HAVE THE BANJO,  
WHICH COMES FROM AFRICA.

AND YOU HAVE THE FIDDLE,

WHICH COMES FROM THE  
BRITISH ISLES AND FROM EUROPE.

AND WHEN THEY MEET,  
THEY MEET IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH.

AND THAT'S THE BIG BANG.

MALONE: AFRICAN-AMERICAN STYLE  
WAS EMBEDDED IN COUNTRY MUSIC

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING  
OF ITS COMMERCIAL HISTORY.

YOU CAN'T CONCEIVE  
OF THIS MUSIC EXISTING

WITHOUT THIS  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN INFUSION.

BUT AS THE MUSIC DEVELOPED  
PROFESSIONALLY,

TOO OFTEN, AFRICAN-AMERICANS  
WERE FORGOTTEN.

COUNTRY MUSIC  
WASN'T CALLED THAT YET,

BUT IT WAS MUSIC  
OF THE COUNTRY.

IT WAS A COMBINATION OF THE  
IRISH, THE RECENTLY FREED SLAVES

BRINGING THE BANJO INTO  
THE WORLD, THE SPANISH EFFECTS

OF THE VAQUEROS  
DOWN IN TEXAS, THE GERMANS

BRINGING OVER  
THE OOMPAH OF POLKA MUSIC

ALL CONVERGING.

[THE HILL BILLIES  
PLAYING "OLD JOE CLARK"]

NARRATOR: SPROUTING  
FROM SO MANY ROOTS--

OLD BALLADS AND HYMNS,  
TIN PAN ALLEY COMPOSITIONS,

MINSTREL SHOWS,  
AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN BLUES--

THE MUSIC RALPH PEER  
AND HIS COMPETITORS HAD BEGUN

RECORDING IN THE 1920s  
WAS HARD TO CATEGORIZE

OR PRECISELY DEFINE,

BUT FOR MARKETING REASONS,  
THE COMPANIES NEEDED

A NAME FOR IT.

IN 1925,  
RALPH PEER RECORDED A SPIRITED

STRING BAND FRONTED  
BY AL HOPKINS IN NEW YORK CITY.

AS THEY WERE LEAVING, HE  
ASKED WHAT NAME HE SHOULD USE

FOR THEM IN HIS ADVERTISING.

HOPKINS ANSWERED,  
"CALL US ANYTHING.

WE'RE NOTHING BUT A BUNCH  
OF HILLBILLIES

FROM NORTH CAROLINA  
AND VIRGINIA."

PEER HAD THE NAME HE NEEDED.

SOON, MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS  
WERE REFERRING TO THE ENTIRE

STYLE AS "HILL-BILLY MUSIC."

NOT EVERY ARTIST APPRECIATED  
THE TERM OR THE WAY THEY WERE

OFTEN PORTRAYED AS QUAIN'T  
AND QUIRKY BACKWOODS HAYSEEDS.

THE EDITOR OF "VARIETY" MAGAZINE  
DESCRIBED HILLBILLIES AS

"ILLITERATE AND IGNORANT,"  
POOR WHITE TRASH

WITH THE INTELLIGENCE  
OF MORONS."

"HILLBILLY WAS NOT A FUNNY  
WORD," ONE MUSICIAN SAID.

"IT WAS A FIGHTING WORD."

PARTON: IT DOESN'T  
OFFEND US HILLBILLIES.

IT'S OUR MUSIC.

BUT IF YOU'RE AN OUTSIDER  
AND YOU'RE SAYING  
IT'S "HILLBILLY MUSIC,"

'CAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW  
ANY BETTER, IT'S ALMOST LIKE

A RACIST REMARK.

IF WE'RE HILLBILLIES,

WE'RE PROUD OF THAT.

BUT YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO SAY  
IT IF YOU DON'T REALLY KNOW

WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT  
OR MEAN IT.

NARRATOR: BUT AS LONG AS  
IT HELPED SELL RECORDS,

MANY PERFORMERS  
WERE FINE WITH IT,

INCLUDING  
"FIDDLIN' JOHN" CARSON,

WHO HAD ALREADY  
ADOPTED THE PERSONA

OF A COUNTRY BUMPKIN FROM  
NORTH GEORGIA RATHER THAN

THE FORMER ATLANTA  
MILL WORKER HE REALLY WAS.

[STEAM WHISTLE BLOWS]

[RADIO STATIC]

MAN, ON RADIO: ...WOULD TAKE  
ADVANTAGE OF THIS OFFER...

NARRATOR:  
RADIO WAS EXPLODING.

THERE WERE NOW HUNDREDS OF  
STATIONS IN EVERY CORNER

OF THE COUNTRY, AND TO ATTRACT  
MORE LISTENERS, THEY ALL

BORROWED FROM ONE OF  
THE OLDEST TRADITIONS

OF MIXING MUSIC AND COMMERCE,  
THE TRAVELING MEDICINE SHOW.

[BOBBY HORTON PLAYING  
"WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN?"]

SECOR: IN A MEDICINE SHOW,  
YOU COME INTO TOWN, YOU SET UP

IN THE TOWN SQUARE,  
AND YOU HAWK AN ELIXIR.



YOU'VE GOT THIS REMEDY.

AND YOU PASS OUT HANDBILLS,  
AND YOU TAKE

PERSONAL TESTIMONIALS  
FROM PAID DUDES OUT THERE

IN THE AUDIENCE.

AND THEY TELL YOU ABOUT  
HOW WONDERFUL THEY FEEL,

HOW THEIR DROPSY WENT AWAY  
AND HOW THEIR SORES

AND FESTERING WOUNDS  
HAVE HEALED BECAUSE OF THIS

CORN WHISKY, THIS SNAKE OIL.

SO, YOU'VE GOT YOUR PRODUCT,

AND MUSIC IS ONLY THERE  
TO PUSH YOUR PRODUCT.

MUSIC IS JUST LIKE  
THE SOAPBOX YOU STAND ON.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MESSAGE,

AND RADIO AMPLIFIED THAT.

THE RADIO  
CHANGED EVERYTHING.

NARRATOR:  
IN TINY MILFORD, KANSAS,

DR. JOHN R. BRINKLEY  
HAD SET UP A CLINIC

THAT PROMISED TO RESTORE  
MEN'S SEXUAL POTENCY  
BY A SPECIAL TECHNIQUE--

IMPLANTING BILLY GOAT  
TESTICLES INTO THEM.

TO PROMOTE HIS BUSINESS,  
BRINKLEY STARTED RADIO STATION

KFKB--WHOSE CALL  
LETTERS STOOD FOR

"KANSAS FIRST,  
KANSAS BEST"--

AND FILLED MOST OF THE BROADCAST  
DAY INVITING LISTENERS

TO HIS CLINIC  
AND ASSURING THEM THAT "A MAN

IS AS OLD AS HIS GLANDS."

BRINKLEY, ON RADIO: THIS IS  
A WELCOME OPPORTUNITY

AND ONE THAT YOU SHOULD  
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF

WHILE IT IS POSSIBLE  
FOR YOU TO DO SO...

NARRATOR: HE FILLED  
THE REST OF THE SCHEDULE  
WITH CROP REPORTS,

WEATHER FORECASTS, AND LIVE  
MUSIC BY "UNCLE" BOB LARKAN,

THE ARKANSAS STATE  
CHAMPION FIDDLER.

SHENANDOAH, IOWA, HAD TWO  
RADIO STATIONS, OWNED BY

COMPETING SEED STORES.

THEY STAGED FIDDLE CONTESTS  
AND LIVE MUSIC FROM GROUPS

NAMED THE "CORNFIELD CANARIES"  
AND THE "SEEDHOUSE GIRLS,"

IN BETWEEN PITCHES  
FOR THEIR PRODUCTS.

SALES SKYROCKETED.

AND BEFORE LONG, SHENANDOAH,  
POPULATION 5,000, WAS FLOODED

WITH VISITORS FROM ALL OVER  
THE MIDWEST WHO WANTED TO

WATCH THE BROADCASTS  
IN PERSON, PROMPTING

BOTH COMPANIES TO BUILD ORNATE  
AUDITORIUMS, ARCADE SHOPS,

A MINIATURE GOLF COURSE,

AND TOURIST CABINS TO  
ACCOMMODATE THE CROWDS.

NARRATOR: BUT THEY WERE  
SOON ECLIPSED BY

SEARS, ROEBUCK IN CHICAGO,  
WHICH LAUNCHED STATION WLS,  
FOR THE "WORLD'S LARGEST STORE."

ON SATURDAY NIGHT,  
APRIL 19, 1924,

WLS PREMIERED A NEW SHOW,  
"THE NATIONAL BARN DANCE."

IT WAS MODELED AFTER  
A SQUARE DANCE PROGRAM

ALREADY POPULAR IN FORT WORTH,

BUT THE CHICAGO SHOW  
QUICKLY BECAME

THE BIGGEST OF ITS KIND  
IN THE NATION.

NARRATOR: MEANWHILE,  
IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE,

THE SUCCESS OF STATIONS  
LIKE CHICAGO'S WLS

AND ATLANTA'S WSB CAUGHT

THE ATTENTION OF EDWIN CRAIG,  
THE SON OF THE FOUNDER

OF NATIONAL LIFE  
AND ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY.

A RADIO STATION, HE BELIEVED,  
MIGHT PROVE AN EFFECTIVE WAY

TO HELP THE COMPANY'S  
2,500 SALESMEN,

WHO SOLD LOW-COST

SICKNESS AND BURIAL  
POLICIES DOOR-TO-DOOR

TO WORKING-CLASS FAMILIES

IN MORE THAN 20 STATES.

EDWIN CRAIG'S FATHER  
WAS AGAINST IT.

WOMAN: MY GRANDFATHER  
THOUGHT IT WAS

A WASTE OF MONEY AND TIME.

"WE ARE IN THE INSURANCE  
BUSINESS, AND THAT'S  
WHAT WE SHOULD DO."

BUT EDWIN SAID, "OH, DAD,  
LET ME SHOW YOU

THAT THIS CAN  
SELL INSURANCE."

THE WHOLE IDEA WAS  
TO SELL INSURANCE.

NARRATOR: WITH HIS FATHER'S  
RELUCTANT PERMISSION, CRAIG

SET UP A STUDIO ON  
THE 5th FLOOR OF THE COMPANY'S

DOWNTOWN OFFICE BUILDING,

WITH THICK CARPETS AND PLEATED  
DRAPES HUNG FROM THE CEILING

TO IMPROVE THE ACOUSTICS.

THEY BEGAN BROADCASTING ON  
OCTOBER 5, 1925,

WITH THE CALL LETTERS WSM.

ROBINSON:  
"WE SHIELD MILLIONS."

AND THAT BECAME  
THE LOGO OF THE STATION.

AND IT WAS BUILT AROUND  
A SHIELD, "WE SHIELD MILLIONS."

NARRATOR: CRAIG RECRUITED  
THE PERSONABLE GEORGE D. HAY

FROM WLS AND MADE HIM  
WSM'S PROGRAM DIRECTOR.

THOUGH ONLY 30 YEARS OLD,  
HAY CALLED HIMSELF "THE SOLEMN

OLD JUDGE," AND OFTEN  
PUNCTUATED HIS BROADCASTS BY

BLOWING ON  
A WOODEN RIVERBOAT WHISTLE.

[WHISTLE BLOWS]

NARRATOR: ON NOVEMBER 28, 1925,  
GEORGE HAY INVITED

AN ELDERLY MUSICIAN NAMED  
UNCLE JIMMY THOMPSON,

A FIDDLER SINCE BEFORE  
THE CIVIL WAR, TO PERFORM

ON THE AIR.

HE CALLED HIS INSTRUMENT "OLD  
BETSY," WHICH HE SAID HAD BEEN

PASSED DOWN FROM HIS ANCESTORS  
IN SCOTLAND, AND THAT NIGHT

PLAYED FOR A SOLID HOUR.

THE RESPONSE PERSUADED HAY  
TO SCHEDULE

A REGULAR SATURDAY NIGHT  
BARN DANCE ON WSM,

USING LOCAL TALENT  
WILLING TO WORK FOR FREE.

DR. HUMPHREY BATE,

A VANDERBILT-TRAINED PHYSICIAN  
FROM A PROMINENT

TENNESSEE FAMILY WITH  
A PASSION FOR OLD-TIME MUSIC,

BROUGHT HIS STRING BAND  
TO THE SHOW.

HAY LIKED THEIR MUSIC,  
BUT INSISTED THEY NEEDED

A NEW NAME.

DR. BATE'S ORCHESTRA SOON  
BECAME THE POSSUM HUNTERS.

HAY WOULD DO THE SAME WITH  
OTHER BANDS, INSISTING THEY

TAKE ON HILLBILLY PERSONAS,  
EVEN IF THEY WERE

URBAN SOPHISTICATES.

THE BIGGEST STAR OF WSM'S NEW  
BARN DANCE WAS DAVID MACON,

WHO HAD ONCE MADE HIS LIVING  
DRIVING MULE WAGONS

NEAR MURFREESBORO, PLAYING  
HIS BANJO AS HE TRAVELED,

AND SINGING, IT WAS SAID,  
"IN A VOICE YOU COULD

HEAR A MILE UP THE ROAD."

HAY: AND NOW FRIENDS,  
WE PRESENT UNCLE DAVE MACON,

THE DIXIE DEWDROP--WITH  
HIS PLUG HAT, GOLD TEETH,

CHIN WHISKERS, GATES-AJAR  
COLLAR, AND THAT MILLION-DOLLAR

TENNESSEE SMILE,  
AND HIS SON DORRIS.

LET HER GO, UNCLE DAVE!  
[APPLAUSE]

NARRATOR: KNOWN AS "UNCLE DAVE"  
MACON, HE ENTERTAINED

AUDIENCES WITH HIS VERSATILE  
BANJO PICKING, HIS MIXTURE

OF OLD-TIME AND TIN PAN  
ALLEY SONGS, AND HIS

BOISTEROUS ANTICS.

â€ ME AND MY BUDDIES  
STARTED OUT THE OTHER DAY â€

â€ STUDYIN' A PLAN  
HOW TO GET AWAY â€

â€ LIGHT COME ON,  
AND THEY CAUGHT US IN THE DARK â€

â WAITIN' FOR THE  
CHESTERFIELD TRAIN TO START â

â CONDUCTOR WAS  
A-STANDIN' RIGHT... â

MALONE: UNCLE DAVE MACON  
HAD A VERVE AND A VITALITY

AND AN ENERGY THAT SCARCELY  
ANY YOUNGER PERFORMER POSSESSED.

IT WAS A REAL TREAT NOT ONLY  
TO HEAR HIM SING AND PLAY

THE BANJO, BUT TO WATCH HIM.

HE PLAYED, HE TWIRLED  
THE BANJO, HE STOMPED HIS FEET,

HE WHOOPED AND YELLED,  
AND HE WAS A STOREHOUSE

OF STORIES.

MACON: â TAKE A-ME BACK  
TO THAT OLD CAROLINA HOME â

NARRATOR: MACON WAS PROUD  
TO BE CALLED A HILLBILLY.

IN 1924, HE HAD BEEN THE FIRST  
TO USE THE TERM IN A RECORDING.

HE BILLED HIMSELF  
AS "THE STRUTTINEST STRUTTER

THAT EVER STRUTTED A STRUT."

MACON: â ...OLD CAROLINA HOME,  
OH, YEAH! â

SECOR: HE WAS JUST  
SUCH A DOWN-HOME,

FOLKSY ENTERTAINER.

MACON: â TAKE A-ME BACK,  
TAKE A-ME BACK TO THAT OLD... â

SECOR: AND HE SANG SONGS  
LARGELY BORROWED

FROM THE BLACK TRADITION

AND DIDN'T DO

ANYTHING TO HIDE IT, EITHER.

âa WHOA, YES,  
TAKE A-ME BACK âa

âa TAKE A-ME BACK

âa TAKE A-ME BACK TO MY  
OLD CAROLINA HOME âa

[CHEERING AND APPLAUSE]

DeFORD BAILEY:  
âa YOU KNOW, I GOT THE BLUES...

MAN: I DIDN'T PLAY  
WHILE I WAS WORKING,

BUT WHENEVER  
WE STOPPED TO EAT

OR TAKE A BREAK, I'D PULL  
OUT MY HARP AND START

BLOWING ON IT.

ONE TIME I WAS WORKING FOR  
A WHITE FELLER IN A CORNFIELD,

AND HE TOLD ME THAT IF  
I WORKED FOR HIM, I'D HAVE TO

LEAVE MY HARP AT HOME.

"WELL," I TOLD HIM, "IF I DO,  
I'LL HAVE TO STAY

AT HOME WITH IT."

I MEANT IT, TOO.

DeFORD BAILEY.

NARRATOR: ANOTHER REGULAR

ON WSM'S "BARN DANCE"  
WAS DeFORD BAILEY.

HE WAS BORN ABOUT 40 MILES  
EAST OF NASHVILLE IN 1899,

THE GRANDSON OF A SLAVE.

INSTEAD OF A BABY RATTLE,  
BAILEY TOLD PEOPLE,

HIS PARENTS GAVE



HIM A HARMONICA.

AT AGE 3, HE WAS STRICKEN  
WITH POLIO AND CONFINED TO HIS

BED FOR NEARLY A YEAR.

IT LEFT HIM WITH A SLIGHTLY  
DEFORMED BACK

AND STUNTED HIS GROWTH.

SECOR: AND IN THAT TIME

THAT HE WAS LAYING IN THE BED  
FOR A YEAR, HE WOULD LISTEN TO

TRAINS GO BY, AND HE  
WOULD BLOW HIS HARMONICA

JUST LIKE 'EM.

HE LISTENED TO DOGS BAYING,  
AND HE PLAYED JUST LIKE 'EM.

HE COULD MIMIC ANYTHING.

NARRATOR: BAILEY WAS BARELY  
4'10" TALL,

WEIGHING LESS THAN 100 POUNDS.

AND BY 1925, HE WAS  
LIVING IN NASHVILLE, WHERE HE

HAD HELD A SERIES OF JOBS--

A HOUSEBOY FOR  
SEVERAL WEALTHY FAMILIES,

WORKING IN THE KITCHEN  
AT THE MAXWELL HOUSE HOTEL,

SHINING SHOES AT A LOCAL  
BARBER SHOP--ALL THE TIME

DEVELOPING HIS OWN STYLE  
ON THE HARMONICA AND HOPING TO

MAKE A LIVING WITH HIS MUSIC.

ONE OF HIS FAVORITE TUNES  
WAS THE "FOX CHASE,"

A SONG THAT DATED BACK TO

IRISH BAGPIPE MUSIC

AND THAT BAILEY HAD HEARD HIS

GRANDFATHER PLAY  
ON THE FIDDLE.

BAILEY: "HEY, SIC IT!  
HEP, HEP..."

NARRATOR: HIS VERSION  
ADDED THE SHOUTS OF  
THE FOX HUNTER URGING HIS

HOUD DOGS ON,  
WITHOUT SKIPPING A BEAT

ON THE HARMONICA.

WHEN I WAS A KID,  
I LISTENED TO THE RADIO AND I--

I REMEMBER HIM.

BOY, HE'D PLAY THE "FOX CHASE"  
AND--AND YOU WOULD...

YOU WERE RIGHT THERE WITH  
HIM, CHASING THAT FOX. HA HA!

MAN: DeFORD BAILEY  
AND HIS FAMOUS "FOX CHASE."

NARRATOR: ALONG WITH  
"UNCLE DAVE" MACON  
AND THE POSSUM HUNTERS,

DeFORD BAILEY QUICKLY  
BECAME ONE OF WSM'S

MOST POPULAR PERFORMERS,  
APPEARING ON THE SHOW

MORE THAN ANY OTHER ACT.

WOMAN: NEEDLESS TO SAY,  
WE THOROUGHLY ENJOY

YOUR SATURDAY NIGHT PROGRAM.

I HAVE ONE REQUEST TO MAKE,  
AND THAT IS WHEN YOUR

HARMONICA ARTIST PUTS ON THE  
"FOX HUNT," THAT WE ARE GIVEN

SOME ADVANCE NOTICE.

LAST NIGHT,

MY OLD BIRD DOG WAS LAYING  
IN FRONT OF THE FIREPLACE  
WHEN YOUR ARTIST

REPEATED THE WORDS,  
"GET HIM! SIC HIM!"

BAILEY: â HEY, SIC IT...

WOMAN: BEFORE ANYONE  
COULD INTERFERE,  
MY OLD DOG HAD TURNED OVER

TWO FLOOR LAMPS  
AND A SMOKING STAND.

MRS. HOLLOWAY SMITH,  
JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI.

NARRATOR:  
BETWEEN THE BROADCASTS,

LIKE THE "BARN DANCE'S"  
OTHER STARS,

BAILEY SPENT THE WEEK  
TOURING IN OTHER TOWNS.

SECOR: YOU KNOW,  
YOU'VE GOT DeFORD BAILEY

AND "UNCLE DAVE" MACON.

UNCLE DAVE MACON'S FATHER  
WAS A CAPTAIN

IN THE CONFEDERATE ARMY.

DeFORD BAILEY'S GRANDPARENTS  
WERE SLAVES.

NOW THEY'RE WORKING--THEY'RE  
DRIVING IN A PACKARD CAR,

CRISSCROSSING THE SOUTH.

DeFORD CAN'T STAY IN ANY OF  
THE HOTELS "UNCLE DAVE" IS IN,

HE CAN'T EAT IN ANY OF THOSE  
RESTAURANTS, BUT HE IS FREE

WHEN HE'S STANDING UP  
ON THE STAGE.

NARRATOR: MEANWHILE,

THE HILLBILLY IMAGE GEORGE HAY

PROMOTED FOR THE SHOW HAD  
BEGUN TO GRATE

ON NASHVILLE'S BUSINESS LEADERS  
AND SOCIAL ELITE.

EDWIN CRAIG'S COUNTRY CLUB  
FRIENDS WORRIED THAT  
THE "BARN DANCE,"

EVEN THOUGH IT WAS  
BROADCAST ONLY ONCE A WEEK,

WAS DAMAGING  
THE CITY'S REPUTATION.

NASHVILLE WAS VIEWED AS  
THE "ATHENS OF THE SOUTH."

WE HAVE THE BIG FINE  
PARTHENON, WHICH IS AN EXACT

REPLICA OF THE PARTHENON  
IN ATHENS, GREECE.

AND WE HAVE THESE  
WONDERFUL UNIVERSITIES.

THEY THOUGHT THE HILLBILLY MUSIC  
WAS TACKY AND TERRIBLE.

THEY'D RATHER STAY  
THE "ATHENS OF THE SOUTH,"

AND DON'T TALK  
ABOUT COUNTRY MUSIC.

[ORCHESTRA PLAYING "MARDI GRAS"  
FROM "MISSISSIPPI SUITE"]

NARRATOR: TO MOLLIFY  
HIS CRITICS, EDWIN CRAIG

BEGAN BROADCASTING  
A MORE REFINED SHOW FROM NBC,

FEATURING THE NEW YORK  
SYMPHONY CONDUCTED BY

DR. WALTER DAMROSCH, JUST BEFORE  
SWITCHING TO THE "BARN DANCE."

ONE NIGHT, DAMROSCH CLOSED  
HIS SHOW WITH THE ORCHESTRA

IMITATING THE SOUND OF  
A TRAIN COMING INTO A STATION.

JUDGE HAY CAME ON THE AIR  
IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARD

AND CALLED ON DeFORD BAILEY,  
WHO PERFORMED A HARMONICA PIECE

THAT DUPLICATED THE SOUND  
OF A STEAM LOCOMOTIVE

AS IT STARTS OFF SLOWLY, PICKS  
UP SPEED, AND THEN FADES AWAY

INTO THE DISTANCE.

[HARMONICA IMITATING  
TRAIN CHUGGING]

"SOME PEOPLE CAN PLAY  
THE TRAIN," BAILEY SAID,

"BUT THEY CAN'T MAKE IT  
MOVE LIKE I DO."

[BAILEY IMITATING TRAIN CLACKING  
AND TRAIN WHISTLE]

â€

â€

"WE HAD BEEN LISTENING TO MUSIC  
TAKEN LARGELY FROM GRAND OPERA,"

HAY INFORMED HIS LISTENERS  
WHEN BAILEY WAS FINISHED.

"FROM NOW ON, WE WILL  
PRESENT THE GRAND OLE OPRY."

THEN HE BLEW HIS TRADEMARK  
WOODEN WHISTLE AND INSTRUCTED

HIS ENTERTAINERS, "LET'S KEEP  
IT CLOSE TO THE GROUND, BOYS,"

MEANING NOTHING TOO FANCY.

MACON: â€ BEEN LIVING  
IN THE CITY â€

â€ BUT I LIKE  
THE COUNTRY LIFE... â€

NARRATOR: WITHIN A FEW WEEKS,

THE "BARN DANCE"  
HAD A NEW NAME:

THE "GRAND OLE OPRY."

IT WOULD EVENTUALLY BECOME  
THE LONGEST-RUNNING SHOW

ON AMERICAN RADIO,

AND IT WAS DOING EXACTLY  
WHAT EDWIN CRAIG HAD INTENDED:

REACHING A FAR-FLUNG  
AUDIENCE TO HELP

NATIONAL LIFE'S  
SALES FORCE.

ROBINSON:  
"HELLO, MS. JONES.

"I'M FROM THE 'GRAND OLE OPRY.'

"CAN I COME IN A FEW MINUTES  
AND TALK TO YOU

ABOUT SOME INSURANCE?"

MAN: YOUR SATURDAY NIGHT  
"SHINDIG" HAS GOT MY FLOORS

DOWN TO THE SECOND PLANK,  
AND I'M AFRAID SOMEONE

WILL DROP THROUGH ON  
MY BARREL OF PRESERVES.

WOULD YOU PLEASE SEND ONE  
OF YOUR AGENTS DOWN HERE TO

INSURE MY CARPETS, FLOORS,  
SHOES, AND EVERYTHING

IN CONNECTION WITH  
THE HOUSEHOLD?

GEORGE BRITTING.

MACON: â€a ...HA HA HA HA

[LOUIS ARMSTRONG PLAYING  
"ST. LOUIS BLUES"]

â€a

NARRATOR: BY 1927,  
THE ROARING TWENTIES HAD

REACHED A FULL HEAD OF STEAM.

THE NATION'S WEALTH  
HAD MORE THAN DOUBLED,

AND FOR THE FIRST TIME,  
MORE THAN HALF OF ALL AMERICANS

NOW LIVED IN TOWNS AND CITIES.

PROHIBITION HAD MADE

THE MANUFACTURE AND SALE  
OF LIQUOR ILLEGAL,

BUT PEOPLE FOUND  
PLENTY OF WAYS TO DRINK.

IT WAS CALLED "THE JAZZ AGE,"  
NAMED FOR THE HOT, SYNCOPATED

MUSIC THAT ORIGINATED  
IN NEW ORLEANS AND WAS SWEEPING

THE COUNTRY.

FOR SOME, LIKE THE AUTOMOBILE  
TYCOON HENRY FORD, THE NEW MUSIC

REPRESENTED EVERYTHING

THEY CONSIDERED WRONG WITH  
THE COUNTRY'S MORAL DIRECTION.

MALONE: HENRY FORD FELT THAT  
JAZZ WAS A "JEWISH CONSPIRACY

TO AFRICANIZE  
AMERICAN TASTE."

WHAT HE HOPED TO DO WAS TO  
REINTRODUCE THE OLD-TIME DANCES

OF HIS YOUTH,  
ALONG WITH THE STRING BANDS

AND THE FIDDLING THAT HAD  
ACCOMPANIED THESE DANCES.

AND IN REVITALIZING  
THE OLDER FORMS OF MUSIC,

HE WOULD ALSO  
REVITALIZE THE OLDER SOCIETY.

NARRATOR: FORD ENCOURAGED  
HIS CAR DEALERS TO SPONSOR

TRADITIONAL FIDDLE CONTESTS  
AND PUBLISHED A BOOK

DESCRIBING OLD-TIME DANCE STEPS,

ALL IN THE BELIEF  
IT COULD SOMEHOW

TURN PEOPLE AWAY FROM JAZZ  
AND RESTORE AMERICAN CULTURE

TO A SEEMINGLY SIMPLER,  
MORE VIRTUOUS PAST.

NO ONE HAD DONE MORE THAN  
RALPH PEER TO BRING BOTH KINDS

OF MUSIC TO THE PUBLIC.

SINCE RECORDING  
"FIDDLIN' JOHN" CARSON

AND OTHER HILLBILLY ACTS,

HE HAD ALSO BROUGHT  
MORE BLACK MUSICIANS

INTO THE STUDIO

FOR HIS "RACE" RECORDS:

W.C. HANDY;

JELLY ROLL MORTON;

GUS CANNON'S JUG STOMPERS;

AND KING OLIVER  
AND HIS CREOLE JAZZ BAND,

WITH A YOUNG LOUIS ARMSTRONG  
ON CORNET.

NARRATOR: TO PEER,

HILLBILLY MUSIC AND  
THE BLUES SHARED COMMON ROOTS.

BUT AS A BUSINESSMAN,

HE WAS LESS INTERESTED  
IN MUSIC HISTORY AND THEORY



THAN IN PROFITS,  
AND BY JULY OF 1927,

HE WAS ENJOYING  
PLENTY OF THEM.

HE HAD LEFT HIS JOB WITH OKEH  
AND JOINED THE BIGGEST

RECORDING LABEL IN THE NATION,

THE VICTOR  
TALKING MACHINE COMPANY,

AFTER MAKING THEM  
AN UNPRECEDENTED OFFER--

HE WOULD WORK FOR NO SALARY IF  
HE COULD CONTROL THE COPYRIGHTS

OF THE SONGS AND COLLECT  
THE PUBLISHING ROYALTIES.

THEN HE OFFERED HIS  
ARTISTS SOMETHING EQUALLY

UNPRECEDENTED: RATHER THAN  
BUYING THE COPYRIGHTS OUTRIGHT

FOR A NOMINAL FEE  
AND KEEPING ALL THE ROYALTIES,

AS MOST PUBLISHERS DID,

HE WOULD SHARE  
A PORTION OF FUTURE ROYALTIES

WITH THEM IF THEY  
HAD WRITTEN THE SONG.

HE CALLED IT A "SQUARE DEAL,"  
ONE THAT HAD BEEN DENIED ARTISTS

IN THE PAST, AND MANY  
OF HIS MUSICIANS WERE LURED BY

THE INCENTIVE TO  
FOLLOW HIM TO VICTOR.

AMONG THEM WAS  
ERNEST "POP" STONEMAN,

A CARPENTER

FROM THE BLUE RIDGE SECTION  
OF SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA,

NEAR THE TOWN OF GALAX.

WHEN STONEMAN HAD HEARD

SOME OF THE EARLY  
HILLBILLY RECORDINGS IN 1924,

HE TOLD HIS WIFE  
HE COULD SING BETTER THAN THAT,

AND WENT TO  
NEW YORK TO PROVE IT.

STONEMAN: "IT 'TAS ON  
MONDAY MORNING "

" JUST 'BOUT ONE O'CLOCK

" THAT THE GREAT "TITANIC"  
BEGAN TO REEL AND ROCK... "

NARRATOR: HIS RECORDING  
FOR PEER OF "THE SINKING  
OF THE TITANIC"

BECAME ONE OF THE BIGGEST  
HITS OF THE DAY.

STONEMAN:  
"...SHIP WENT DOWN...

NARRATOR: SOON, HE WAS VICTOR'S  
TOP HILLBILLY ARTIST

AND MAKING ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY  
SOME LAND AND BUILD A NEW HOME

FOR HIS WIFE AND GROWING FAMILY,  
WHICH WOULD EVENTUALLY

NUMBER 23 CHILDREN.

STONEMAN: " WHEN THEY WERE  
BUILDING THE "TITANIC"... "

NARRATOR: PEER WANTED TO MAKE  
MORE RECORDINGS OF STONEMAN.

STONEMAN SUGGESTED THAT  
PEER COME TO HIM, AND BRING HIS

EQUIPMENT TO NEARBY BRISTOL,

A CITY WHICH SAT ASTRIDE  
THE VIRGINIA-TENNESSEE BORDER.

HE PROMISED THAT THE REGION

WAS HOME TO PLENTY OF OTHER ACTS

THAT WOULD MAKE  
THE TRIP WORTHWHILE.

[THUNDER]

SECOR: RALPH PEER  
HAD BEEN CORRESPONDING

WITH "POP" STONEMAN,  
WHO SAID,

"YOU NEED TO COME TO BRISTOL  
SO THAT WE CAN CAPTURE

SOME OF THIS  
LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE,"

THIS SOUND THAT WAS COMING OUT  
OF THE HILLS

AROUND GALAX, VIRGINIA.

[VEHICLE HORN HONKS]

NARRATOR: PEER AND TWO ENGINEERS  
ARRIVED IN BRISTOL

IN LATE JULY 1927 AND SET UP  
THEIR TEMPORARY STUDIO

ON THE SECOND FLOOR  
OF A VACANT BUILDING,

A FORMER HAT COMPANY

ON THE TENNESSEE SIDE  
OF BRISTOL'S MAIN STREET.

THEY WERE USING NEW EQUIPMENT  
NOW, WHICH GREATLY IMPROVED

THE FIDELITY OF THE SOUND--

AN ELECTRIC CARBON MICROPHONE  
INSTEAD OF A HORN

THAT PERMITTED PERFORMERS  
TO SING

WITH GREATER INTIMACY RATHER  
THAN SHOUTING TO BE HEARD.

ALL OF THE EQUIPMENT,  
EXCEPT THE MICROPHONE,

WOULD BE HIDDEN FROM THE ARTIST.

["TELL MOTHER I WILL MEET HER"  
PLAYING]

NARRATOR:  
STONEMAN AND HIS GROUP LAID DOWN

10 TRACKS, BUT RALPH PEER  
BECAME WORRIED

THAT NOT ENOUGH OTHER  
ARTISTS WERE TURNING UP.

HE INVITED THE EDITOR  
OF THE "BRISTOL NEWS BULLETIN"

TO ATTEND THE MORNING SESSION,  
HOPING FOR SOME FREE PUBLICITY.

ERNEST STONEMAN, KAHLE BREWER,  
WALTER MOONEY: "A IN A FAR

" AND DISTANT CITY...

MAN: INTENSELY INTERESTING  
IS A VISIT

TO THE VICTOR TALKING MACHINE  
RECORDING STATION.

THIS MORNING,  
ERNEST STONEMAN AND COMPANY

WERE THE PERFORMERS,

AND THEY PLAYED  
AND SANG INTO THE MICROPHONE

A FAVORITE IN  
GRAYSON COUNTY, VIRGINIA,

NAMELY "I LOVE MY LULU BELLE."

HE RECEIVED FROM THE COMPANY  
OVER \$3,600 LAST YEAR

AS HIS SHARE OF THE PROCEEDS  
ON HIS RECORDS.

NARRATOR: \$3,600 WAS NEARLY 4  
TIMES THE AVERAGE YEARLY INCOME

IN AMERICA.

MAN: THIS WORKED  
LIKE DYNAMITE.

AFTER YOU READ THIS,

IF YOU KNEW HOW TO PLAY  
"C" ON THE PIANO,

YOU WERE GONNA  
BECOME A MILLIONAIRE.

GROUPS OF SINGERS ARRIVED  
BY BUS, HORSE AND BUGGY,

TRAIN, OR ON FOOT.

RALPH PEER.

NARRATOR: NOW GROUPS  
EAGER TO BECOME STARS WERE

QUICKLY ADDED  
TO THE RECORDING SESSION,

INCLUDING  
THE BULL MOUNTAIN MOONSHINERS,

RED SNODGRASS' ALABAMIANS,

AND THE WEST VIRGINIA  
COON HUNTERS.

BUT MUCH MORE IMPORTANT  
TO RALPH PEER

AND TO THE FUTURE  
OF COUNTRY MUSIC WOULD BE

THE TWO ACTS THAT SHOWED UP  
IN BRISTOL THE NEXT WEEK--

THREE MEMBERS OF A FAMILY FROM  
NEARBY MACES SPRING, VIRGINIA,

NAMED THE CARTERS,

AND A FORMER RAILROAD BRAKEMAN  
FROM MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI,

JIMMIE RODGERS.

"SUCCESS," PEER ONCE SAID,  
IS "THE ART OF BEING

WHERE LIGHTNING  
IS GOING TO STRIKE."

[THUNDER]

IT WAS ABOUT TO STRIKE FOR HIM,  
TWICE, AND IN THE SAME LOCATION.

MAN: THE ONLY THING  
MISSING IN THE NEWSPAPER AD,

TO ME,  
WAS, "BRING YOUR SONGS.

BRING YOUR TALENT TO  
THE MICROPHONES TO AUDITION,"

OR WHATEVER.

AND THEY SHOULD HAVE ADDED,  
"WE'RE GOING

TO START AN INDUSTRY NOW."

BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED.

[SARA AND MAYBELLE CARTER  
PERFORMING "SWEET FERN"]

ROSANNE CASH: THE CARTER  
FAMILY WERE ELEMENTAL.

â SPRINGTIME  
IS COMING â

â SWEET LONESOME  
BIRD â

â YOUR ECHO IN THE  
WOODLAND I HEAR... â

IT'S LIKE, YOU KNOW,  
IT WAS THE ATOM.

IT WAS THE BEGINNING  
OF THE BUILDING BLOCKS

FOR THE REST OF US.

AND, UM,  
THOSE FIRST RECORDINGS

AND THOSE SONGS, THEY WERE  
CAPTURED RATHER THAN WRITTEN.

YOU KNOW,  
THEY WERE IN THE HILLS

LIKE ROCK FORMATIONS.

SO, IN 1927,  
THOSE FIRST BRISTOL RECORDINGS,

THESE SONGS THAT WERE PART  
OF THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

WERE GATHERED TOGETHER,  
DOCUMENTED FOREVER,

WITH THESE PLAINTIVE VOICES  
AND THESE ELEMENTAL GUITARS.

THE BEDROCK WAS FORMED  
FOR THE REST OF US.

NARRATOR: ALVIN PLEASANT CARTER  
WAS 35 YEARS OLD

THAT SUMMER OF 1927,  
TRYING TO MAKE ENDS MEET

IN THE SOUTHWEST CORNER  
OF VIRGINIA

IN ONE OF THE STATE'S  
MOST IMPOVERISHED COUNTIES

IN AN AREA CALLED POOR VALLEY.

A.P. HAD BEEN BORN WITH A PALSY,

A SLIGHT SHAKING IN HIS HANDS,  
AND SOMETIMES IN HIS VOICE,

THAT HIS MOTHER BLAMED  
ON A LIGHTNING BOLT

THAT HAD STRUCK THE GROUND NEXT  
TO HER JUST BEFORE HIS BIRTH.

ALTHOUGH HIS SCHOOLING  
ENDED WHEN HE WAS 10,

HE HAD LEARNED TO PLAY  
THE FIDDLE

AND READ THE SHAPE-NOTE  
SONGBOOKS

USED IN THE LOCAL  
METHODIST CHURCH,

IMPRESSING PEOPLE  
WITH HIS RICH BASS VOICE.

HE TOOK A JOB SELLING  
FRUIT TREE SAPLINGS,

RAMBLING FOR MILES ON FOOT

FROM FARM TO FARM.

IN 1914,  
AFTER CROSSING CLINCH MOUNTAIN

TO FIND CUSTOMERS

ON THE MORE PROSPEROUS SIDE  
CALLED RICH VALLEY,

HE HEARD A YOUNG WOMAN'S  
CLEAR AND DEEP VOICE

SINGING NEARBY.

IT CAUGHT HIS INTEREST.

SO DID THE SINGER HERSELF.

CARTER FAMILY:  
"HIS DEAR ARMS AROUND ME

"ARE LOVINGLY CAST...

NARRATOR: SARA DOUGHERTY  
WAS BARELY 16 AT THE TIME

AND STEEPED IN OLD MOUNTAIN  
BALLADS AND GOSPEL HYMNS.

A YEAR LATER, THEY MARRIED.

A.P. BROUGHT HER BY WAGON TO  
A TWO-ROOM CABIN IN POOR VALLEY,

LATER BUILDING  
A MORE PROPER HOME

IN THE FOOTHILLS  
OF CLINCH MOUNTAIN,

NOT FAR FROM MACES SPRING.

AS RESTLESS AS HE WAS  
AMBITIOUS, A.P. WOULD BE GONE

FOR WEEKS AT A TIME  
OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS,

SELLING HIS TREES WHILE LEAVING  
SARA TO CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN,

TEND THE CROPS, CHOP FIREWOOD,

AND HANDLE  
ALL THE RESPONSIBILITIES



OF A MOUNTAIN HOME  
WITHOUT HIS HELP.

WHEN HE WAS HOME,  
THEY SANG AT CHURCH GATHERINGS.

AFTER ONE MAN GAVE  
SARA \$10 BECAUSE, HE SAID,

SHE HAD "THE PRETTIEST  
VOICE I EVER HEARD,"

A.P. GOT THE NOTION  
THEY MIGHT MAKE A LITTLE MONEY

WITH THEIR MUSIC.

IN 1926, A SCOUT FOR  
THE BRUNSWICK LABEL APPEARED

IN THE REGION.

HE WAS LOOKING FOR A SINGING  
FIDDLER, AND SUGGESTED PUTTING

SARA IN THE BACKGROUND  
BECAUSE, HE SAID,

A WOMAN IN THE LEAD  
COULD NEVER BE POPULAR.

A.P. WOULDN'T AGREE.

INSTEAD, HE ADDED  
ANOTHER WOMAN TO THE GROUP--

A YOUNGER COUSIN OF SARA'S  
NAMED MAYBELLE ADDINGTON,

A SHY TEENAGER WHO  
HAD LEARNED TO PLAY THE BANJO

FROM HER MOTHER  
AS WELL AS THE AUTOHARP.

THEN SHE TOOK UP  
THE GUITAR AND MASTERED IT.

WHEN MAYBELLE MARRIED  
A.P.'s BROTHER, ECK CARTER,

THE COUPLE MOVED  
TO A TWO-STORY HOUSE

LESS THAN A MILE  
FROM A.P. AND SARA'S HOME.

IN LATE JULY OF 1927,

A.P. HEARD ABOUT  
RALPH PEER'S BRISTOL SESSIONS,

AND ANNOUNCED THEY WERE GOING.

THE WOMEN  
WERE RELUCTANT AT FIRST.

SARA WAS STILL  
NURSING HER THIRD CHILD,

AND MAYBELLE, NOW 18,  
WAS PREGNANT.

ECK WAS AGAINST IT, TOO,

SINCE HIS WIFE  
WAS SO FAR ALONG.

BUT A.P. WAS INSISTENT,

PERSUADING ECK TO LEND HIM  
HIS CAR

BY PROMISING TO WEED HIS  
BROTHER'S CORNFIELD IN EXCHANGE.

IT TOOK THEM ALL DAY  
TO MAKE THE 26 MILES TO BRISTOL.

THE NEXT MORNING,  
AUGUST 1, 1927,

THEY AUDITIONED FOR PEER.

"AS SOON AS I HEARD  
SARA'S VOICE," HE RECALLED,

"THAT WAS IT.

I KNEW IT WAS GOING  
TO BE WONDERFUL."

CARTER FAMILY: "â€¦FOR  
THE ONLY ONE I LOVE... â€¦"

NARRATOR: THAT EVENING,

THE CARTERS RETURNED  
TO RECORD FOUR SONGS,

BEGINNING WITH "BURY ME  
UNDER THE WEEPING WILLOW,"

AN OLD TUNE SARA AND MAYBELLE

HAD KNOWN ALL THEIR LIVES.

CARTER FAMILY: "OH, BURY ME  
UNDER THE WEeping WILLOW..."

ALTHOUGH A.P.  
HADN'T WRITTEN THE ORIGINAL,

PEER CONSIDERED HIS ARRANGEMENT  
OF IT AND THE OTHERS THEY PLAYED

DIFFERENT ENOUGH FOR CARTER

TO CLAIM A COMPOSER'S CREDIT

AND PERMITTING PEER

TO BE THE PUBLISHER.

"MY HEART IS SAD

AND I'M IN SORROW

FOR THE ONLY ONE I LOVE

WHEN SHALL HE SEE ME

OH, NO, NEVER

TILL WE MEET

IN HEAVEN ABOVE

[CHUCKLES]

AND SO SIMPLE, RIGHT?

I MEAN, IT'S LIKE YOU'VE HEARD  
THE MELODY A MILLION TIMES.

THAT'S ONE OF THOSE SONGS  
THAT FEELS LIKE

IT'S ALWAYS EXISTED.

IF TAYLOR SWIFT  
OR CARRIE UNDERWOOD

OR WHOEVER THE HOTTEST GIRL  
OF THE MOMENT IS

WANTS TO KNOW  
WHERE THEY COME FROM,

THEY NEED TO GO ALL THE WAY BACK  
TO THE VOICE OF SARA CARTER

'CAUSE SHE WAS THE FIRST ONE.

IT'S SARA. THEN THERE'S  
BEEN EVERYBODY ELSE.

IT'S THAT SIMPLE.

AS FAR AS GUITAR PLAYING GOES,

THERE'S MAYBELLE,  
THEN THERE'S EVERYBODY ELSE.

THAT'S THE GENESIS OF IT ALL.

NARRATOR: THE TRIO PERFORMED TWO  
TAKES OF EACH SONG THAT NIGHT,

SARA SINGING LEAD  
AND PLAYING AUTOHARP;

MAYBELLE ON THE GUITAR  
AND ADDING HARMONY,

A.P. SOMETIMES JOINING IN.

PEER WAS IMPRESSED.

HE INVITED THE CARTERS  
TO COME BACK THE NEXT MORNING

FOR ANOTHER SESSION.

ONLY SARA AND MAYBELLE  
SHOWED UP.

A.P. MAY HAVE BEEN GETTING  
A CAR TIRE REPLACED.

IT DIDN'T BOTHER PEER.

HE HAD SARA SING TWO SOLOS  
WITH MAYBELLE ON THE GUITAR.

ONE WAS A TUNE  
SARA SAID SHE DIDN'T LIKE

BUT AGREED TO PERFORM:

"SINGLE GIRL, MARRIED GIRL,"

WHICH COMPARES THE CAREFREE LIFE  
OF AN UNMARRIED WOMAN

TO THE BURDENS OF  
A WIFE LEFT AT HOME

TO CARE FOR HER BABIES.

IT CUT TOO CLOSE.

CARTER FAMILY: "SINGLE GIRL

"SINGLE GIRL

"SHE GOES TO STORE AND BUYS

"OH, SHE GOES TO STORE  
AND BUYS "

"MARRIED GIRL, MARRIED GIRL

"SHE ROCKS THE CRADLE  
AND CRIES "

"OH, SHE ROCKS  
THE CRADLE AND CRIES... "

WELL, THE SINGLE GIRL HAS

THE GOOD LIFE,

AND THE MARRIED GIRL,  
IT'S HARD. IT'S TOUGH.

PERFORMED BY A MARRIED GIRL

WHO, I DON'T THINK SHE  
WANTED TO BE MARRIED ANYMORE.

NARRATOR:  
WITH THE SESSIONS CONCLUDED

AND \$300 IN THEIR POCKETS

AS PAYMENT FOR RECORDING  
SIX SONGS,

THE GROUP NOW CALLED  
THE CARTER FAMILY

HEADED BACK TO MACES SPRING.

"WE MADE IT HOME,"  
SARA REMEMBERED,

"AND NEVER THOUGHT  
NO MORE ABOUT IT.

"WE NEVER DREAMED ABOUT  
THE RECORD BUSINESS TURNING OUT

THE WAY IT DID."

A.P. STARTED WORK HOEING

HIS BROTHER'S CORNFIELD,

JUST AS HE'D PROMISED.

NARRATOR:

MEANWHILE, BACK IN BRISTOL,

PEER WAS ABOUT TO RECORD  
SOMEONE ELSE

WHO WOULD ALSO CHANGE  
HILLBILLY MUSIC FOREVER.

JIMMIE RODGERS:

“ ALL AROUND THE WATER TANK

“ WAITING FOR A TRAIN...

MERLE HAGGARD: SOMEBODY  
TOLD ME A STORY ONE TIME

ABOUT RED FOLEY  
AND BOB WILLS AND ERNEST TUBB.

THEY GOT TOGETHER ONE TIME,

AND THEY WERE ALL  
BIG JIMMIE RODGERS FANS,

AND THEY SAID,  
"COULD WE AGREE

ON OUR FAVORITE TEN--  
TOP TEN JIMMIE RODGERS SONGS?"

AND THEY SAID, WILLS SAID, AFTER  
A LOT OF DEBATE AND TALK,

SAID THEY COULDN'T GET IT  
DOWN TO LESS THAN 50.

NARRATOR: JAMES CHARLES RODGERS  
FROM MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI,

WAS STILL A MONTH SHY  
OF HIS 30th BIRTHDAY

IN AUGUST OF 1927,

BUT HE HAD ALREADY PACKED  
SEVERAL LIFETIMES

INTO THOSE YEARS, MOST OF THEM  
SPENT IN CONSTANT MOTION.

HIS MOTHER HAD DIED  
BY THE TIME HE WAS 6,

AND HIS FATHER,  
WHO QUICKLY REMARRIED,

WAS OFTEN ABSENT,  
WORKING AS A FOREMAN

FOR THE NEW ORLEANS  
AND NORTHEASTERN RAILROAD.

LITTLE JIMMIE ENDED UP  
IN THE CARE OF A SPINSTER AUNT,

WHO WAS CHARMED BY  
HIS IRREPRESSIBLE GOOD HUMOR

AND INDULGED  
HIS ADVENTUROUS SPIRIT.

HE STARTED SKIPPING  
SUNDAY SCHOOL,

THEN SCHOOL ITSELF,

PREFERRING INSTEAD TO SHOOT DICE  
WITH THE SHOESHINE BOYS

AT A LOCAL BARBERSHOP,

LISTEN TO TRAVELING SALESMEN  
SWAP STORIES,

OR HAUNT MERIDIAN'S THEATERS  
THAT OFFERED SILENT MOVIES

BETWEEN VAUDEVILLE ACTS.

HE PICKED UP  
THE MANDOLIN, THEN THE BANJO,

THEN THE GUITAR;

WON AN AMATEUR CONTEST SINGING

"BILL BAILEY, WON'T  
YOU PLEASE COME HOME?";

AND AT AGE 13 RAN AWAY  
FOR A WHILE

WITH A TRAVELING MEDICINE SHOW

BEFORE HIS FATHER  
RETRIEVED HIM IN ALABAMA

AND PUT HIM TO WORK  
AS A WATER BOY

FOR THE RAILROAD'S  
MOSTLY BLACK CREWS,

WHO LAID AND MAINTAINED  
THE TRACKS.

STUART:  
JUST LOOK AT THE TRAIN YARDS

NORTH OR SOUTHBOUND.

YOU CAN ALMOST SEE  
AND HEAR JIMMIE RODGERS

AND THOSE CHARACTERS THAT  
HE WORKED WITH IN THOSE YARDS.

MEN: " PRETTIEST TRAIN THAT...

STUART: AND YOU CAN HEAR  
THE MUSIC OF MISSISSIPPI.

YOU CAN HEAR THE MUSIC OF  
THE OLD SOUTH BEING SUNG TO HIM

ALMOST LIKE  
THOSE FIELD CHANTS

OR, YOU KNOW, THE LABOR CAMPS,  
OR WHEN THEY WOULD DRAG TIE.

YOU CAN ABSOLUTELY SEE HOW  
JIMMIE RODGERS TOOK IT ALL IN.

RODGERS: " HO HO, HEY HEY

" HEY HO HEY...

NARRATOR: OFF AND ON  
FOR THE NEXT DECADE,

HE HELD A SERIES  
OF RAILROAD JOBS--

FLAGMAN, BAGGAGE MAN,  
AND THEN A BRAKEMAN ON THE RUN

BETWEEN MISSISSIPPI  
AND NEW ORLEANS,

BUT IT WAS NEVER STEADY WORK.

HE MARRIED AT AGE 19, WAS  
SEPARATED IN LESS THAN A YEAR,

HOBOED AROUND THE COUNTRY,



THEN CAME BACK TO MERIDIAN,

AND IN 1920,  
AFTER HIS DIVORCE CAME THROUGH,

MARRIED CARRIE WILLIAMSON,

THE 17-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER  
OF A METHODIST PREACHER.

9 MONTHS LATER,  
SHE GAVE BIRTH TO ANITA.

WHEN HE WASN'T WORKING,

JIMMIE LOAFED AROUND  
POOLROOMS AND RAIL YARDS;

WHEN HE WAS WORKING, HIS  
PAYCHECKS QUICKLY DISAPPEARED--

ON TICKETS TO SHOWS,

ON EVERY PHONOGRAPH RECORD  
HE COULD BUY,

AND ON A MEN'S PERFUME HE  
HAD DISCOVERED IN NEW ORLEANS--

BLACK NARCISSUS,  
WHOSE SCENT, HE THOUGHT,

MASKED THE HARSH SMELL  
OF RAILROAD FUMES.

WOMAN, AS CARRIE RODGERS: HIS  
POCKETS ALL HAD HOLES IN THEM.

ANY MONEY THAT WENT INTO THEM  
WENT RIGHT ON OUT AGAIN.

HE ALWAYS DECLARED  
THAT MONEY WAS NO GOOD

UNTIL AFTER YOU'D SPENT IT.

THEN IT WAS GOOD,  
FOR IT HAD FURNISHED YOU

AND THOSE AROUND YOU  
WITH THE GOOD THINGS OF LIFE.

NARRATOR: "IT WAS CHICKEN  
ONE DAY, FEATHERS THE NEXT,"

CARRIE REMEMBERED,  
"BUT IT SEEMED THAT OUR CHICKENS

WERE MOSTLY ALL FEATHERS."

RODGERS JOINED ANOTHER  
TRAVELING SHOW IN 1923,

PERFORMING SOME  
BLUES NUMBERS HE'D PICKED UP,

BUT IT WAS CUT SHORT  
WHEN HE GOT CALLED HOME

AFTER HIS AND CARRIE'S

6-MONTH-OLD  
SECOND DAUGHTER DIED.

A YEAR LATER CAME  
MORE BAD NEWS.

WORKING ONCE MORE  
FOR THE RAILROAD,

RODGERS DEVELOPED  
A HACKING COUGH.

CARRIE NOTICED FLECKS  
OF BLOOD IN HIS HANDKERCHIEF.

A DOCTOR DIAGNOSED  
THE PROBLEM:

IT WAS TUBERCULOSIS,

AT THE TIME THE LEADING CAUSE  
OF DEATH IN THE UNITED STATES.

THERE WAS NO KNOWN CURE.

WOMAN, AS CARRIE RODGERS:  
WHEN HE WAS RELEASED

FROM THE HOSPITAL, WE KNEW--

KNEW THAT NEVER AGAIN  
SHOULD HE BE A LADDER CLIMBER,

NEVER AGAIN RIDE THE DECKS  
AND TEST HIS LUNGS

AGAINST ROARING WINDS,

NEVER AGAIN COLLECT  
A RAILROADER'S STAKE.

[TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS]

NARRATOR:  
RODGERS TURNED TO MUSIC

AS HIS LAST CHANCE  
TO SUPPORT HIS WIFE

AND SURVIVING DAUGHTER.

HE PLAYED  
FOR DANCES AROUND MERIDIAN

AND BRIEFLY JOINED  
A MEDICINE SHOW,

STRUMMING HIS BANJO  
IN BLACKFACE

ON VILLAGE STREET CORNERS

WHILE A SO-CALLED DOCTOR PEDDLED  
SNAKE OIL TO PASSERSBY.

HE WOULD VISIT STORES

AND TALK THE OWNER INTO  
SELLING HIM A GUITAR ON CREDIT,

THEN GO TO THE NEAREST PAWN SHOP  
TO HOCK IT FOR CASH.

IN EARLY 1927,

RODGERS MOVED HIS FAMILY  
TO ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA,

HOPING THE MOUNTAIN AIR  
WOULD IMPROVE HIS HEALTH.

THERE HE MET A STRING BAND  
TRIO CALLED THE TENNEVA RAMBLERS

AND FORMED A QUARTET.

THE GROUP  
WAS BARELY SCRAPING BY

WHEN ONE OF THE MEMBERS  
DECIDED TO GO ASK HIS FATHER,

A BARBER IN BRISTOL, TENNESSEE,

FOR HELP GETTING  
A BETTER CAR FOR TOURING.

RODGERS WENT ALONG WITH HIM.

THEY ARRIVED ON AUGUST 1st,

THE SAME DAY THE CARTER FAMILY  
WERE DOING  
THEIR FIRST RECORDING,  
AND WENT TO A BOARDING HOUSE  
NEAR THE BUILDING  
RALPH PEER WAS RENTING.

THERE THEY LEARNED THAT  
THE TOWN WAS FULL OF MUSICIANS  
TRYING TO MAKE RECORDS  
WITH THE VICTOR LABEL.

THEY HURRIED BACK  
TO NORTH CAROLINA

FOR THE OTHER BAND MEMBERS

AND RETURNED TO BRISTOL  
ON AUGUST 3rd.

BUT AS THEY REHEARSED  
IN THE BOARDING HOUSE,

THE GROUP FELL APART.

THE OTHER MEMBERS SAID RODGERS  
COULDN'T PLAY WELL ENOUGH.

AN ARGUMENT BROKE OUT  
AND ENDED

WHEN RODGERS SAID THEY  
COULD DO WHAT THEY WANTED.

HE WOULD RECORD BY HIMSELF  
WITH JUST HIS GUITAR.

SECOR: THE TENNEVA RAMBLERS  
WEREN'T REALLY ANYTHING SPECIAL.

BREAKING UP MIGHT BE  
THE BEST THING

THAT EVER HAPPENED  
TO COUNTRY MUSIC.

JIMMIE RODGERS:  
"SLEEP, BABY, SLEEP..."

NARRATOR: ON THE AFTERNOON  
OF AUGUST 4, 1927,

JIMMIE RODGERS ENTERED

RALPH PEER'S MAKESHIFT STUDIO.

"I LIKED HIM THE FIRST TIME  
I SAW HIM," PEER RECALLED.

RODGERS SANG  
ONLY TWO TUNES THAT DAY,

"THE SOLDIER'S SWEETHEART"  
AND "SLEEP, BABY, SLEEP."

HE ASSURED PEER  
THAT WITH A LITTLE MORE TIME,

HE COULD COME UP  
WITH A LOT MORE.

THEN HE LEFT TOWN.

JIMMIE RODGERS: "â€¦WHILE  
ANGELS WATCH OVER YOU... â€¦"

NARRATOR: DURING HIS TWO WEEKS  
IN BRISTOL, PEER RECORDED

MORE THAN TWO DOZEN  
PERFORMING ACTS.

A FEW OF THEM  
WOULD GO ON TO HAVE

LONG CAREERS  
IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS;

MOST WOULD SOON BE FORGOTTEN.

BUT BY DISCOVERING

THE CARTER FAMILY

AND JIMMIE RODGERS,

RALPH PEER HAD SET

THE FUTURE OF COUNTRY MUSIC

IN MOTION.

MALONE: I THINK

JIMMIE RODGERS REPRESENTED

THE RAMBLING SIDE  
OF COUNTRY MUSIC--

THE DESIRE TO HIT THE ROAD,

LEAVE RESPONSIBILITIES BEHIND,

TO GO OUT  
AND EXPERIENCE THE WORLD.

THE CARTER FAMILY,  
ON THE OTHER HAND,

EMBODIED THE SANCTITY  
OF THE HOME AND OF THE FAMILY,

PARTICULARLY MOTHER,  
WHO KEPT THE HOME TOGETHER.

AND THOSE HAVE BEEN  
TWO IMPORTANT IMPULSES

IN COUNTRY MUSIC EVER SINCE

'CAUSE SORT OF THE REVERSE SIDES  
OF THE SAME COIN.

[WHISTLE BLOWS]

NARRATOR: THAT NOVEMBER,

SHORTLY AFTER HIS FIRST  
RECORDING HAD BEEN RELEASED,

RODGERS SHOWED UP  
UNANNOUNCED IN NEW YORK CITY

WITH ONLY \$10 IN HIS POCKET.

HE CHECKED  
INTO AN EXPENSIVE HOTEL,

SHOWED THE DESK CLERK  
A COPY OF HIS NEW RECORD

AND BRASHLY TOLD HIM  
TO CHARGE EVERYTHING

TO THE VICTOR COMPANY.

THEN HE CALLED RALPH PEER

TO SAY HE WAS READY  
FOR ANOTHER SESSION.

NARRATOR: AMONG  
THE FOUR SIDES RODGERS RECORDED

A FEW DAYS LATER WAS  
ONE HE HAD STRUNG TOGETHER

FROM A MIXTURE OF SONGS

HE HAD HEARD OVER THE YEARS--

A STANDARD  
12-BAR BLUES MELODY

WITH SNATCHES  
OF BORROWED LYRICS

THAT INTRODUCED THELMA,

"THAT GAL  
THAT MADE A WRECK OUT OF ME,"

BUT BRAGGED,  
"I CAN GET MORE WOMEN

THAN A PASSENGER TRAIN  
CAN HAUL,"

THEN WARNED,  
"I'M GONNA BUY ME A PISTOL

JUST AS LONG AS I'M TALL"

AND, "I'M GONNA SHOOT  
PORE THELMA

JUST TO SEE HER JUMP AND FALL."

JIMMIE RODGERS: "I'M  
GONNA SHOOT PORE THELMA..."

NARRATOR: TO IT HE ADDED  
WHAT HE CALLED A "BLUE YODEL,"

SOMETHING HE HAD BEEN DEVELOPING

THAT ALSO DREW  
FROM DEEP ROOTS--

THE ALPINE YODELS THAT BECAME  
POPULAR IN AMERICA IN THE 1840s,

THEN WERE ADAPTED BY BLACK  
AND BLACKFACE MINSTREL SINGERS

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY.

JIMMIE RODGERS  
WAS CONFLATING THE BLUES

WITH THE RURAL WHITE  
EXPERIENCE AND SOUND.

AND I THINK THIS WENT ON A LOT.

WE JUST DON'T SEE IT  
UNTIL HE SHOWED UP.

AND, OF COURSE,  
HE HAD THAT LITTLE YODEL,

â YODEL-LEH-HEE-EEE-AY-  
OH-DE-LO â

â OH-OH DE-LAY

AND, UH, PEOPLE HADN'T  
REALLY HEARD THAT BEFORE.

NARRATOR:  
HE WAS "TACKING YODELS

ONTO JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING,"  
CARRIE REMEMBERED.

"EVEN HIS SHARE OF  
CONVERSATION AROUND THE HOUSE  
WAS LARGELY YODELS."

PEER RELEASED THE NEW SONG  
UNDER THE TITLE "BLUE YODEL"

IN THE SPRING OF 1928.

IT WAS AN IMMEDIATE HIT.

JIMMIE RODGERS: â ...RATHER  
DRINK MUDDY WATER... â

HAGGARD:  
WELL, HE HAD SONGS THAT SPOKE

IN THE LANGUAGE THEY UNDERSTOOD

ABOUT SUBJECT MATTER  
THEY UNDERSTOOD.

JIMMIE RODGERS: â ...MUDDY WATER  
AND SLEEP IN A HOLLOW LOG... â

HAGGARD: HE HAD THIS WONDERFUL  
EAR AND THIS WONDERFUL VOICE.

AND HIS DELIVERY WAS TOTALLY,  
TOTALLY UNHEARD OF.

I THINK IT CAME OUT  
OF THE BLACK BLUES

AND MIXED IN  
WITH HIS YODELING,



AND THEY CALLED HIM  
THE "BLUE YODELER."

NARRATOR: RODGERS HAD  
EVEN GREATER SUCCESS

WITH A SONG RECORDED  
IN A THIRD SESSION,

ALSO DERIVED FROM  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN BLUES

AND JUG BAND MUSICIANS--  
"HE'S IN THE JAILHOUSE NOW."

SECOR: WE GET TO GO  
TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS

WHEN WE BUY  
JIMMIE RODGERS RECORDS.

WE'RE ABLE TO GO  
TO THOSE JUKE JOINTS

THAT WE'RE NOT INVITED TO.

WHETHER WE KNOW IT OR NOT,  
THAT'S WHERE THE APPEAL IS.

JIMMIE RODGERS:  
"HE'S IN THE JAILHOUSE NOW

"HE'S IN  
THE JAILHOUSE NOW... "

NARRATOR:  
BY MIDSUMMER OF 1928

WITH THE RELEASE OF MORE SONGS,

"BRAKEMAN'S BLUES"

AND A NUMBER PEER ENTITLED  
"BLUE YODEL NO. II,"

ROYALTIES STARTED  
POURING IN--\$1,000 A MONTH,

WHICH RODGERS SPENT  
AS QUICKLY AS THEY ARRIVED.

HE PAID \$1,500 FOR  
THE "JIMMIE RODGERS SPECIAL,"

A PERSONALIZED  
MARTIN GUITAR WITH GOLD INLAY,

HIS NAME SPELLED OUT  
IN MOTHER OF PEARL ON THE NECK,

AND THE WORD "THANKS"  
EMBLAZONED ON THE BACK.

NARRATOR: HE BEGAN A TOUR OF  
MAJOR THEATERS AND AUDITORIUMS

IN THE SOUTH,  
MAKING \$500 A WEEK,

SOMETIMES APPEARING  
IN HIS RAILROAD OUTFIT

AND BILLING HIMSELF  
AS "THE SINGING BRAKEMAN."

IN MIAMI, APPEARING

BEFORE A HUGE INTERNATIONAL  
MEN'S BIBLE CLASS,

HE ADMITTED HE  
DIDN'T KNOW ANY CHURCH SONGS,

SO HE SANG  
"IN THE JAILHOUSE NOW"

AND THE RACY  
"FRANKIE AND JOHNNY" INSTEAD.

THEY GAVE HIM  
A STANDING OVATION.

THEN HE MADE  
A TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO MERIDIAN,

ARRIVING IN A SHINY NEW CAR,

WEARING EXPENSIVE CLOTHES  
AND DIAMOND RINGS,

AND MAKING A PUBLIC POINT OF  
PAYING OFF HIS OLD DEBTS.

STUART: HE TALKED ABOUT US.

HE WAS OUR REPRESENTATIVE.

AS COUNTRY PEOPLE,  
HE WAS OUR AMBASSADOR.

HE WAS A ROGUE  
JUST LIKE THE REST OF US.

HE HAD HARD TIMES JUST LIKE  
THE REST OF US,

BUT WE APPRECIATED HIM  
DRESSING UP IN HIS COOL CLOTHES

AND DRIVING IN HIS FANCY CAR

AND TALKING ABOUT US  
COUNTRY PEOPLE.

HE REPRESENTED US WELL.

NARRATOR: RODGERS ADDED

A STRING OF PERSONAL APPEARANCES

AND AUTOGRAPH SESSIONS  
AT LOCAL MUSIC STORES

AND CAROUSED WITH OLD FRIENDS

DESPITE HIS  
INCREASING EXHAUSTION.

EACH PERFORMANCE  
LEFT HIM WEAKER,

DRIPPING IN SWEAT  
AND GASPING FOR BREATH.

ONE NIGHT,  
HE BLACKED OUT BACKSTAGE.

A DOCTOR TOLD HIM  
THAT WITHOUT PROPER REST,

HE WOULDN'T LIVE  
MORE THAN ANOTHER YEAR OR TWO.

INSTEAD, RODGERS  
BOOKED HIMSELF ON ANOTHER TOUR

AND ANOTHER RECORDING SESSION.

RALPH PEER  
NOW BEGAN EXPERIMENTING

WITH NEW ORCHESTRATIONS  
AND STYLES FOR HIS STAR--

JAZZ ENSEMBLES,  
SMALL ORCHESTRAS,

AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
JUG BANDS, UKULELES,

CHAMPION WHISTLERS,

OR SIMPLY MUSICIANS  
JIMMIE RODGERS

HAPPENED TO HAVE MET THE DAY  
BEFORE A RECORDING SESSION.

PEER SAID, "HE COULD  
RECORD ANYTHING."

MALONE: IT DIDN'T MATTER TO  
HIM WHERE THE MUSIC CAME FROM.

IT DIDN'T MATTER TO HIM  
WHAT THE STYLE WAS

THAT HE PLAYED.

I THINK HE WAS WILLING  
TO DO WHATEVER WAS COMMERCIAL,

WHATEVER WOULD CATCH  
THE ATTENTION OF LISTENERS.

NARRATOR: TO HELP HIM  
COME UP WITH MORE SONGS

THAT COULD BE COPYRIGHTED,

RODGERS HAD ENLISTED  
CARRIE'S SISTER,

ELSIE McWILLIAMS,  
A SUNDAY SCHOOL MUSIC TEACHER

WITH A GIFT FOR  
TURNING AN OVERHEARD PHRASE

OR RANDOM INCIDENT  
INTO A MELODY WITH LYRICS.

JIMMIE COULDN'T READ  
MUSICAL NOTATIONS.

"CRAZY LITTLE FLY SPECKS  
WITH FUNNY TAILS,"

HE CALLED THEM,

SO SHE OFTEN CAME TO TEACH  
HER NEW COMPOSITIONS TO HIM

IN PERSON.

IN ALL, ELSIE McWILLIAMS  
WOULD WRITE OR CONTRIBUTE TO

MORE THAN A THIRD  
OF RODGERS' RECORDED SONGS.

AT ONE SESSION IN DALLAS,

WHICH WOULD INCLUDE  
A HAWAIIAN STEEL GUITAR PLAYER,

ELSIE HEARD JIMMIE SAY,  
"I'D LIKE TO HAVE ME

ONE OF THEM HULA-HULA GIRLS."

THAT NIGHT SHE CAME UP WITH  
A NEW SONG, WHICH THEY RECORDED

THE NEXT MORNING:  
"EVERYBODY DOES IT IN HAWAII."

JIMMIE RODGERS: "EVERYBODY  
DOES IT IN HAWAII"

"SHE'S GOT TWO PURTY LEGS...

NARRATOR: WITH ITS SUGGESTIVE  
DOUBLE ENTENDRES,

THE SONG EARNED A WARNING  
FROM "VARIETY" MAGAZINE

THAT RECORD DEALERS

SHOULD "NOT SELL THIS  
INTO POLITE FAMILIES,"

BECAUSE, THE REVIEW SAID,

"IT'S NEVER MADE CLEAR

WHAT EVERYBODY DOES IN HAWAII."

[JIMMIE RODGERS YODELING]

NARRATOR: AT ANOTHER SESSION  
OUT IN HOLLYWOOD,

PEER WOULD BRING IN  
A 28-YEAR-OLD TRUMPET PLAYER

TO ACCOMPANY RODGERS.

IT WAS LOUIS ARMSTRONG,  
WHO WAS ON HIS WAY TO BECOMING

THE MOST INFLUENTIAL  
JAZZ ARTIST OF ALL TIME.

THEY BOTH WERE PUSHING  
THE BOUNDARIES OF THEIR MUSIC.

RODGERS AND ARMSTRONG:  
â ...DIDN'T MEAN NO HARM...

MAN: MY FATHER  
WANTED TO GET THEM TOGETHER

TO SEE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN, TO  
HAVE THAT CHEMISTRY EXPERIMENT,

BECAUSE HE KNEW  
BOTH INDIVIDUALS.

HE KNEW THE STRENGTH  
OF THEIR PERSONALITIES.

AND HE KNEW  
THEIR ARTISTIC TALENT.

NARRATOR: TOGETHER,  
THEY RECORDED

"STANDIN' ON THE CORNER,"  
THE STORY OF A TENNESSEE HUSTLER

ARRESTED ON  
BEALE STREET IN MEMPHIS.

[TRUMPET SOLO]

[JIMMIE RODGERS YODELING]

NARRATOR: PEER RELEASED IT

AS "BLUE YODEL NUMBER 9."

[HORSE NEIGHING]

MAN: HYAH! HYAH!

NARRATOR: MEANWHILE,  
RODGERS HAD RELOCATED TO TEXAS,

WHOSE DRY CLIMATE HAD  
ATTRACTED SEVERAL SANITARIUMS

FOR TREATING TUBERCULOSIS.

IN HIS NEW SURROUNDINGS,

HE BECAME THE "YODELING COWBOY,"

INSPIRING A GENERATION  
OF FOLLOWERS TO BELIEVE

THAT ALL COWBOYS  
NOT ONLY SANG BUT YODELED.

JIMMIE RODGERS: SURE.

GIVE ME THAT OLD GUITAR, THEN...

NARRATOR: IN THE FALL OF 1929,

PEER BROUGHT RODGERS TO  
A STUDIO IN CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY,

TO MAKE A SHORT  
TALKING PICTURE.

MANY MUSIC EXECUTIVES  
SAW THE TALKIES

AS A THREAT  
TO LIVE PERFORMANCES.

PEER SAW THEM  
AS ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY

FOR HIS STAR  
TO BECOME BETTER KNOWN.

â ALL AROUND  
THE WATER TANKS â

â WAITING FOR A TRAIN

â A THOUSAND MILES

â AWAY FROM HOME

â SLEEPING IN THE RAIN

â THOUGH MY POCKETBOOK  
IS EMPTY â

â MY HEART IS FULL OF PAIN

â I'M A THOUSAND MILES  
AWAY FROM HOME â

â WAITING FOR  
A TRAIN â

â YODEL-LEH-HEE-OH-  
DE-LEH-HEE-AY â

â DE-LEH-HEE

[THE CARTER FAMILY PLAYING  
"KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE"]

NARRATOR: IN 1928,  
RALPH PEER HAD CALLED

THE CARTER FAMILY  
BACK INTO THE STUDIO.

THEIR FIRST RECORDINGS  
HAD SOLD WELL, AND HE WAS EAGER

TO CAPITALIZE ON  
THEIR GROWING POPULARITY.

THEY RECORDED 12 MORE SONGS.

AMONG THEM WAS

"KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE,"

WHICH A.P. WOULD ADOPT

AS THE CARTER FAMILY'S  
SIGNATURE TUNE,

AND ANOTHER SONG,

"I'LL TWINE MID THE RINGLETS,"

THAT HAD BEEN HANDED DOWN

IN MAYBELLE'S FAMILY  
FOR GENERATIONS.

â I WILL TWINE WITH MY MINGLES

â AND WAVING BLACK HAIR

â WITH THE ROSES SO RED

â AND THE LILIES SO FAIR

AND THEN WE GET INTO...

â AND THE MYRTLES SO BRIGHT

â AS THE EMERALD DEW

â PALE AND THE LEADER

â AND EYES LOOK LIKE BLUE

SARA CARTER: â OH, I'LL TWINE  
WITH MY MINGLES... â

NARRATOR: THE CARTERS'  
RE-TITLED THEIR VERSION



"WILDWOOD FLOWER,"  
FEATURING SARA SINGING ALONE,

WITH MAYBELLE DEMONSTRATING  
A GUITAR TECHNIQUE

SHE WAS PERFECTING  
IN WHICH SHE PICKED THE MELODY

WITH HER THUMB  
ON THE BASS STRINGS

WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY PROVIDING  
THE RHYTHM AND CHORDS

WITH HER OTHER FINGERS.

"I DIDN'T EVEN THINK  
ABOUT IT," SHE SAID.

"I JUST PLAYED THE WAY  
I WANTED TO, AND THAT'S IT."

IT WOULD COME TO BE  
CALLED THE CARTER SCRATCH.

MAYBELLE USED  
A THUMB PICK AND A FINGER PICK

WHEN SHE PLAYED GUITAR.

AND SHE REALLY  
ONLY USED TWO FINGERS--

THE THUMB  
AND THE FOREFINGER.

THIS THUMB WAS THE DRIVING FORCE  
FOR THE MELODY.

AND GRANDMA WOULD JUST TELL ME,

BECAUSE I WAS SO LITTLE

WHEN SHE TAUGHT ME  
THE CARTER SCRATCH,

SHE SAID, "THIS MIDDLE FINGER,  
YOU JUST KEEP IT GOING

NO MATTER WHAT."

HA HA! AND THAT WAS KIND OF  
LIKE THE CLUE TO IT ALL,

TO A SMALL CHILD.

MAN: TO ME,  
MOTHER MAYBELLE AS A GUITARIST

WAS MAYBE  
THE MOST ICONIC INSTRUMENTALIST

THAT WE'VE EVER HAD.

THERE'S RHYTHM,

AND THERE'S  
THE MELODY.

AND AT ITS SIMPLEST PLACE,

IT STILL CARRIES  
MAYBE THE MOST POETRY.

NARRATOR: MAYBELLE'S  
TECHNIQUE WOULD BECOME

ONE OF THE MOST COPIED  
GUITAR STYLES IN MUSIC HISTORY.

McEUEEN: I WAS TALKING  
TO DUANE ALLMAN'S DAUGHTER

A WHILE BACK, AND SHE TOLD ME,

"MY MAMA TOLD ME THAT DADDY

"TAUGHT HER HOW TO PLAY  
'WILDWOOD FLOWER'

ON THE GUITAR."

NOW, CAN YOU IMAGINE  
DUANE ALLMAN SAYING, "NO, HONEY,

IT'S LIKE THIS."

[IMITATING "WILDWOOD FLOWER"  
MELODY]

THAT'S HOW POWERFUL  
THE CARTER FAMILY MUSIC WAS.

THERE'S NOT  
A GUITAR PLAYER THAT'S PICKED UP

A 6-STRING, I DON'T  
THINK, THAT HASN'T TOUCHED

ON SOME CARTER FAMILY MUSIC.

NARRATOR:  
WHEN "WILDWOOD FLOWER,"

AND "KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE"  
SOLD MORE THAN 100,000 RECORDS,

ROYALTIES STARTED FLOWING  
IN TO MACES SPRING.

A.P. WAS ABLE TO BUY  
HIS FIRST AUTOMOBILE.

HE SCoured THE AREA FOR  
NEW SONGS HE COULD COPYRIGHT,

SEARCHING FOR THEM  
AMONG HIS NEIGHBORS,

RETURNING WITH HIS POCKETS  
FILLED WITH SCRAPS OF PAPER

CONTAINING BITS  
AND PIECES OF LYRICS.

MAN: HE WAS A SONG CATCHER.

HE'D HEAR ABOUT SOMEONE  
HAVING A SONG, YOU KNOW,

THREE HOLLERS OVER,

AND IT WOULD TAKE HIM  
ALL DAY TO GO UP

AND HEAR THIS PERSON,  
YOU KNOW,

AND THEN HE'D COME BACK HOME.

BUT HE'D HAVE A NEW SONG  
THAT HE HAD NEVER HEARD BEFORE.

NARRATOR: A.P. HAD  
TROUBLE REMEMBERING MELODIES,

SO SARA AND MAYBELLE  
WOULD SET THE WORDS

TO OLD ONES  
THEY HAD KNOWN FOR YEARS.

THEN THE THREE OF THEM WOULD  
PRACTICE THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1928,

A.P. WAS ON A SONG-GATHERING  
TRIP IN KINGSPORT, TENNESSEE,

IN THE BLACK SECTION OF TOWN,

WHEN HE MET A BLUES SINGER  
AND SLIDE GUITAR PLAYER

NAMED LESLEY RIDDLE.

RIDDLE HAD LOST A LEG  
IN AN ACCIDENT

AND NOW SUPPORTED HIMSELF

PLAYING ON STREET CORNERS  
AND RAILROAD DEPOTS.

A.P. INVITED HIM TO HELP  
IN THE HUNT FOR NEW SONGS,

AND RIDDLE ACCEPTED, ULTIMATELY  
MAKING 15 TRIPS

WITH CARTER THROUGH VIRGINIA,  
EAST TENNESSEE, NORTH CAROLINA,

AND PARTS OF GEORGIA.

MAN, AS LESLEY RIDDLE: HE'D JUST  
GO INTO PEOPLE'S HOMES

AND TELL THEM, "HELLO.  
I WAS TOLD BY SOMEONE THAT YOU

"GOT A SONG,  
KIND OF AN OLD SONG.

WOULD YOU MIND  
LETTING ME HEAR IT?"

SO THEY'D GO AND GET IT  
AND SING IT FOR HIM.

HE'D GO 90 MILES  
IF HE HEARD SOMEONE SAY

THAT SOMEONE HAD AN OLD SONG

THAT HAD NEVER BEEN RECORDED  
OR DIDN'T HAVE A COPYRIGHT.

NARRATOR: WHILE CARTER  
WROTE DOWN THE WORDS,

RIDDLE FOCUSED  
ON MEMORIZING THE MELODIES.

"I WAS HIS TAPE RECORDER,"  
RIDDLE SAID.

RIDDLE ALSO SHARED SOME BLUES  
GUITAR STYLINGS WITH MAYBELLE

AND INTRODUCED  
THE CARTERS TO HYMNS SUNG

IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN PENTECOSTAL  
AND BAPTIST CHURCHES,

WHICH THEY ADDED TO THEIR OWN  
GOSPEL AND SACRED SELECTIONS.

CARTER FAMILY:  
â OH, MY LOVING MOTHER

â WHEN THE WORLD'S ON FIRE

â DON'T YOU WANT GOD'S BOSOM

â TO BE YOUR PILLOW?

â TIDE ME OVER

â IN THE ROCK OF AGES

â ROCK OF AGES CLEFT FOR ME...

NARRATOR:  
ONE MELODY HE TAUGHT THEM

WAS "WHEN THE WORLD'S ON FIRE."

THE CARTER FAMILY  
WOULD LATER REUSE THE BASIC TUNE

FOR ANOTHER SONG,  
"LITTLE DARLING, PAL OF MINE."

A FEW YEARS AFTER THAT,  
WOODY GUTHRIE,

AN ADMIRER OF THE CARTERS,  
WOULD INCORPORATE IT

INTO HIS CLASSIC  
"THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND."

GIDDENS: THAT'S AMERICA.

IT CAME FROM THIS BLACK CHURCH

AND ENDED UP  
AS THIS FOLK ANTHEM.

YOU KNOW, YOU HAVE ALL THESE--  
THESE DIFFERENT PEOPLE GOING,

"OH, I LOVE THAT.  
LET ME USE IT."

IT'S NOT, LIKE, "OH, WE CAN'T  
USE THAT BECAUSE IT'S BLACK."

BUT IT'S, LIKE,  
"OH, I LOVE THAT."

THAT'S THE BEAUTIFUL  
PART OF AMERICAN MUSIC, IS,

LIKE, IT DOESN'T MATTER  
WHO IT CAME FROM.

"I LOVE THAT, AND I WANT  
TO DO SOMETHING WITH IT."

NARRATOR: UNLIKE JIMMIE RODGERS,  
WHO TOURED CONSTANTLY,

THE CARTERS STAYED  
CLOSE TO HOME.

MAYBELLE WAS NOW A MOTHER, TOO.

HER DAUGHTER HELEN HAD BEEN BORN

SHORTLY AFTER  
THE BRISTOL SESSIONS;

A SECOND DAUGHTER, JUNE, CAME  
ALONG IN THE SUMMER OF 1929.

SARA HAD HER OWN  
THREE CHILDREN TO CARE FOR,

AND SHE HATED  
PUBLIC PERFORMANCES

IN FRONT OF TOTAL STRANGERS.

BUT A.P. ORGANIZED SHORT TRIPS

IN WHICH THEY WERE FED  
AND HOUSED OVERNIGHT

BY RURAL FANS.

HE TACKED UP POSTERS  
ON BARNS AND TREES, ANNOUNCING

AN APPEARANCE BY THE TRIO  
IN CHURCHES, SCHOOLS,

OR SMALL-TOWN THEATERS.

ADMISSION WAS  
FROM 15 TO 25 CENTS.

"THE PROGRAM," THE POSTERS  
PROMISED, "IS MORALLY GOOD."

DURING PERFORMANCES,  
A.P.'s ATTENTION

SOMETIMES SEEMED TO WANDER.

"IF HE FELT LIKE SINGING,  
HE WOULD SING," MAYBELLE SAID.

"IF HE DIDN'T,  
HE LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW.

SO WE NEVER DEPENDED ON HIM."

MOST OF THE TIME, THE CARTERS  
STAYED IN POOR VALLEY,

WHERE NEIGHBORS OFTEN  
GATHERED OUTSIDE THEIR HOUSE

JUST TO HEAR THEM PRACTICE

FOR THE INCREASING NUMBER  
OF RECORDING SESSIONS

RALPH PEER  
WAS SCHEDULING FOR THEM

IN ATLANTA, MEMPHIS, CHARLOTTE,  
AND CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY.

THE SESSION FEES AND ROYALTIES  
FROM RECORD SALES--

700,000 COPIES IN TWO YEARS--  
PROVIDED A STEADY INCOME.

A.P. BOUGHT  
LARGER PIECES OF LAND.

SARA GOT HERSELF  
SOME PERFUME AND A MINK STOLE.

MAYBELLE PURCHASED  
A BIGGER GIBSON GUITAR FOR \$275.

BOTH WOMEN INDULGED THEMSELVES  
BY BUYING MOTORCYCLES.

CARTER FAMILY: "â€¦CAN'T FEEL  
AT HOME IN THIS WORLD ANYMORE"

NARRATOR:  
THEN IN OCTOBER OF 1929,  
  
THE FINANCIAL BUBBLE  
THAT HAD FUELED

THE ROARING TWENTIES BURST.

THE STOCK MARKET CRASHED,

AND THE NATION DESCENDED

INTO WHAT WOULD BE CALLED  
THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

BANKS AND BUSINESSES  
FAILED BY THE THOUSANDS.

MILLIONS OF WORKERS  
LOST THEIR JOBS.

IN MAJOR CITIES, DESTITUTE  
RESIDENTS RELIED ON BREADLINES

AND SOUP KITCHENS  
MERELY TO SURVIVE.

CARTER FAMILY: "IT TAKES  
A WORRIED MAN "

" TO SING A WORRIED SONG...

NARRATOR: THE RECORDING  
INDUSTRY WAS HARD-HIT.

BETWEEN 1929 AND 1930,

RECORD SALES  
IN THE UNITED STATES DROPPED

FROM \$74 MILLION  
TO \$46 MILLION,

THEN TO 17 MILLION IN 1931.

NO ARTIST WAS IMMUNE,

ALTHOUGH FOR A WHILE SALES OF  
CARTER FAMILY RECORDS HELD UP,

PARTLY THANKS TO THEIR SONG  
"WORRIED MAN BLUES,"

THEIR BEST-SELLER OF 1930,

WHICH SEEMED TO BOTH CAPTURE



THE NATION'S MOOD

AND EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT  
"I WON'T BE WORRIED LONG."

CARTER FAMILY: "BUT I WON'T BE  
WORRIED LONG"

[TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS]

[JIMMIE RODGERS PLAYING  
"NO HARD TIMES"]

RODGERS:  
"GOT CORN IN MY CRIB

"COTTON GROWING IN MY PATCH

"GOT CORN IN MY CRIB

"COTTON GROWING IN MY PATCH

"GOT THAT OLD HEN SETTIN'

"WAITIN' FOR THAT OLD HEN  
TO HATCH"

"DEE YODEL-A-HEE-OH-LAY-HEE

"OH-LAY-HEE

PICK THAT THING, BOY.

NARRATOR: BY 1932,

JIMMIE RODGERS  
WAS MORE POPULAR THAN EVER.

HARD-UP FARMERS WERE SAID  
TO COME TO TOWN AND TELL

STOREKEEPERS, "GIVE ME A SACK  
OF FLOUR, A SLAB OF BACON,

AND THE LATEST  
JIMMIE RODGERS RECORD."

FANS WROTE HIM LETTERS  
AS IF ALL HIS SONGS WERE

TRUE STORIES FROM HIS LIFE.

THEY ASKED HIM WHY HE  
HAD WANTED TO SHOOT POOR THELMA,

ABOUT HIS TIME IN  
THE JAILHOUSE

OR OUT ON THE OPEN RANGE,

EVEN CASTIGATED CARRIE  
ON THE BELIEF SHE HAD LOVED

ANOTHER MAN WHILE HE SERVED  
AS A BRAKEMAN RIDING THE RAILS.

"THEY PROVED THE SINCERITY THAT  
WAS IN HIS VOICE AS HE SANG,"

HIS WIFE RECALLED.

"HE'D HAD TROUBLES.  
HE'D SUFFERED.

THOSE TRUTHS WERE  
IN HIS SONGS."

WITH THE FAMOUS HUMORIST  
WILL ROGERS, HE MADE A TOUR

ON BEHALF OF VICTIMS OF THE  
DEPRESSION AND THE DUST BOWL.

THEIR APPEARANCES  
RAISED \$300,000

IN MUCH-NEEDED RELIEF.

BUT THE DEEPENING  
ECONOMIC CRISIS

AFFECTED JIMMIE RODGERS, TOO.

"YOU'RE STILL AT  
THE TOP OF THE HEAP,"

RALPH PEER ASSURED HIM,  
"BUT THE HEAP ISN'T SO BIG."

["MULE SKINNER BLUES" PLAYING]

NARRATOR: TO HELP PAY  
HIS BILLS, RODGERS

KEPT ON TOURING DESPITE  
HIS WORSENING HEALTH.

RODGERS:  
"GOOD MORNING, CAPTAIN

"GOOD MORNING,  
SHINE... "

NARRATOR: HE SEEMED TO DRAW

STRENGTH FROM HIS AUDIENCES,

EVEN IF THEY WERE  
NOW IN SMALLER VENUES.

HE WOULD STOP IN THE CENTER OF  
A TOWN AND PLAY FOR FREE,

GAINING THE PUBLICITY  
HE WANTED

FOR THAT NIGHT'S  
PAID PERFORMANCE,

THEN MOVE ON THE NEXT DAY.

EVERYWHERE RODGERS WENT,  
LEGENDS GREW UP.

A BLIND NEWSBOY IN McALESTER  
WAS SAID TO HAVE BEEN GIVEN

A NEW GUITAR;

A WIDOW IN ANOTHER TOWN  
WAS SAID TO HAVE HAD

HER MORTGAGE PAID OFF.

SOMETIMES HE LIKED  
TO INVITE PRETTY WOMEN

TO RIDE AROUND TOWN  
WITH HIM IN HIS SHINY CAR.

AFTER A STOP IN O'DONNELL,  
TEXAS, PEOPLE SAID HE LEFT

TWO DIVORCES AND THREE  
SEPARATIONS IN HIS WAKE.

AND EVERYWHERE HE WENT,

HIS MUSIC RESONATED,

ESPECIALLY "MULE SKINNER BLUES."

HAGGARD: "MULE SKINNER BLUES,"  
HIS DELIVERY ON IT

WAS SO TREMENDOUS.

I DON'T KNOW. IT JUST--

IT ROLLS WITH THE FLOW.

IT STARTS OUT WITH A BANG

AND ENDS UP WITH A BANG.

AND IT HAS SOMETHING  
TO SAY, AND IT'S ENTERTAINING.

â GOOD MORNING, CAPTAIN

â GOOD MORNING,  
SHINE â

â YEAH

â DO YOU NEED ANOTHER  
MULE SKINNER â

â OUT ON YOUR NEW MUD LINE?

IT'S JUST GOOD.

[CHUCKLES]

NARRATOR:  
THE BANK ROBBER BONNIE PARKER

IN THE MIDST OF A CRIME SPREE

WITH HER LOVER,  
CLYDE BARROW,

SPENT SOME OF THEIR STOLEN MONEY

TO BUY EVERY ONE  
OF RODGERS' RECORDS.

IN BROWNWOOD, TEXAS,  
A YOUNG ERNEST TUBB REMEMBERED

PEOPLE LINING UP FOR BLOCKS  
TO SEE HIM IN PERSON,

PAYING A DOLLAR  
AND FILLING A LOCAL THEATER

THAT HAD TROUBLE  
GETTING HALF THAT CROWD

FOR A MOVIE COSTING A DIME.

BUT IT ALL CAME AT A COST.

HE TRAVELED NOW  
WITH BAGS FULL OF MEDICINE,

WHOSE SMELL HE MASKED

WITH HIS BLACK NARCISSUS PERFUME

AND INCREASING DOSES OF MORPHINE  
HE TOOK WITH SHOTS OF WHISKY

TO COMBAT THE PAIN  
THAT RACKED HIS CHEST

WITH PROLONGED FITS OF COUGHING  
THAT BROUGHT UP BLOODY SPITTLE.

HE COLLAPSED FROM  
EXHAUSTION MORE FREQUENTLY,

HAD NIGHT SWEATS THAT KEPT  
HIM FROM SLEEPING.

RODGERS MADE NO SECRET  
OF THE DISEASE

THAT WAS KILLING HIM

OR HOW HE INTENDED  
TO RESPOND TO IT.

"I'M NOT GOING TO LAY  
IN ONE OF THESE HOSPITAL ROOMS

AND COUNT THE FLY SPECKS  
ON THE WALL," HE TOLD PEOPLE.

"I WANT TO DIE  
WITH MY SHOES ON."

WOMAN, AS CARRIE RODGERS: I NOW  
CAME TO REALIZE THE AWFUL IMPORT

OF THOSE TWO SIMPLE  
WORDS "WASTING AWAY,"

AND I ASKED MYSELF FRANTICALLY,

HOW LONG? A MONTH? TWO?  
A YEAR?

NARRATOR: RODGERS CONVINCED  
A PRISONER

IN A TEXAS PENITENTIARY  
TO WRITE HIM

A SONG ABOUT HIS  
TUBERCULOSIS, "TB BLUES,"

TO WHICH HE ADDED  
A FINAL STANZA:

"GEE, BUT THE GRAVEYARD  
IS A LONESOME PLACE.

"THEY PUT YOU ON YOUR BACK,  
THROW THAT MUD DOWN  
IN YOUR FACE."

HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF OTHER  
AMERICANS HAD TUBERCULOSIS, TOO.

"LUNGERS" THEY WERE CALLED,

AND MANY FAMILIES  
HAD BEEN TOUCHED BY THE DISEASE

IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

JIMMIE RODGERS:  
"GEE, BUT THE GRAVEYARD

IS A LONESOME PLACE...

NARRATOR: AT ONE PERFORMANCE,  
A PERSON IN THE AUDIENCE

SHOUTED OUT  
SOME ENCOURAGEMENT.

"SPIT 'ER UP, JIMMIE,"  
HE SAID, "AND SING SOME MORE."

RODGERS:  
"THEY PUT YOU ON YOUR BACK

THROW THAT MUD DOWN  
IN YOUR FACE... "

WOMAN, AS CARRIE RODGERS: TO THE  
LUNGERS, IT WAS A GREATER TONIC

THAN ANY PHYSICIAN  
HAD BEEN ABLE TO PRESCRIBE.

IT WAS THEIR OWN LANGUAGE.

SO THEY CHUCKLED,  
"OLD BOY JIMMIE. HE KNOWS!"

AND THEIR  
CHUCKLES WERE GOOD MEDICINE.

[BOAT HORN BLOWING]

NARRATOR: ON MAY 14, 1933,  
RODGERS ARRIVED IN NEW YORK CITY

AND CHECKED INTO THE SAME HOTEL  
NEAR TIMES SQUARE

WHERE HE HAD STAYED BACK  
IN 1927,

WHEN HE WAS  
A COMPLETE UNKNOWN.

AS ALWAYS, HE WAS  
WORRIED ABOUT MONEY

AND WANTED TO GO BACK  
INTO THE STUDIO.

RALPH PEER WAS SHOCKED  
AT HIS APPEARANCE

AND INSISTED HE REST A FEW DAYS

BEFORE STARTING  
HIS RECORDING SESSION.

ON MAY 17th  
IN THE VICTOR STUDIO,

HE BEGAN THE WAY HE HAD  
STARTED HIS RECORDING CAREER--

JUST HIMSELF AND HIS GUITAR.

RODGERS: "I'VE BEEN AWAY  
JUST A YEAR TODAY "

" BUT SOON I WILL CEASE  
TO ROAM... "

NARRATOR:  
IN TWO LONG, DIFFICULT DAYS,

HE LAID DOWN SIX SONGS.

RODGERS: "...DOING NO HARM

" I'M YODELING MY WAY  
BACK HOME... "

NARRATOR: THE TUBERCULOSIS  
WAS SHREDDING HIS LUNGS,

AND HE WAS HEAVILY SEDATED  
FOR THE PAIN,

SIPPING WHISKEY TO CLEAR  
HIS THROAT BETWEEN TAKES.

THE ENGINEERS HAD TO CARRY  
HIM TO HIS CAB

AFTER THE SECOND AFTERNOON,  
AND HE RESTED FOR TWO DAYS  
BEFORE RETURNING TO RECORD  
TWO MORE SONGS,  
PROPPED UP BY PILLOWS  
IN AN EASY CHAIR  
IN FRONT OF THE MICROPHONE.

ON MAY 24th, HE FELT  
STRONG ENOUGH TO STAND

AT THE MICROPHONE  
AND PERFORMED FOUR SONGS,

RESTING ON A COT  
IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM

BETWEEN EACH TAKE.

RODGERS: "SOON I'LL BE BACK  
IN MY OLD MAMMY'S SHACK"

"YODELING FOR HER  
THIS OLD TUNE..."

NARRATOR: WITH THE SESSION OVER,  
RODGERS FELT REINVIGORATED.

HE TOOK IN  
CONEY ISLAND THE NEXT DAY,

HAD HOT DOGS FOR LUNCH,

DRANK A GLASS OF  
NEWLY LEGALIZED 3.2 BEER,

AND NAPPED IN THE SUN.

[RODGERS YODELING]

NARRATOR: BUT THAT NIGHT,  
BACK AT HIS HOTEL,

FITS OF COUGHING SWEEPED  
THROUGH HIM,

AND HE BEGAN HEMORRHAGING

BRIGHT RED SPOTS  
ONTO HIS PILLOWS.

NARRATOR: EARLY IN THE MORNING  
OF MAY 26, 1933,



JIMMIE RODGERS DIED,  
DROWNING IN HIS OWN BLOOD.

HE WAS ONLY 35 YEARS OLD.

[RODGERS PLAYING "MISS  
THE MISSISSIPPI AND YOU"]

â

RODGERS:

â I'M GROWING TIRED

â OF THE BIG CITY'S LIGHTS

â TIRED OF THE GLAMOUR

â AND TIRED OF THE SIGHTS

â IN ALL MY DREAMS

â I AM ROAMING ONCE MORE

â BACK TO MY HOME

â ON THE OLD RIVER SHORE

â I AM SAD AND WEARY...

NARRATOR: THE SOUTHERN RAILWAY  
ADDED A SPECIAL BAGGAGE CAR

TO ITS NEW ORLEANS RUN

TO CARRY  
THE SINGING BRAKEMAN HOME.

HIS PEARL-GRAY CASKET,  
COVERED WITH LILIES

RESTED ON A PLATFORM  
IN ITS CENTER,

WITH A PHOTOGRAPH OF RODGERS

DRESSED IN HIS RAILROAD  
UNIFORM, TWO THUMBS UP--

THE BRAKEMAN'S SIGNAL THAT  
EVERYTHING WAS READY TO MOVE ON.

BIG CITY NEWSPAPERS  
IN THE EAST

MADE ONLY PASSING REFERENCE  
TO RODGERS' DEATH,

BUT IN SMALL TOWNS THROUGHOUT  
THE SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST,

IT DOMINATED THE FRONT PAGES.

SOLEMN CROWDS  
GATHERED ALONG THE TRACKS

TO PAY THEIR RESPECTS  
AS THE TRAIN MADE ITS WAY

TOWARD MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI.

AFTER A FUNERAL AT  
THE CENTRAL METHODIST CHURCH,

HE WAS BURIED  
IN THE OAK GROVE CEMETERY,

BESIDE THE DAUGHTER  
WHO HAD DIED IN INFANCY.

HIS CAREER HAD LASTED  
LESS THAN 6 YEARS,

BUT IN THAT TIME,

JIMMIE RODGERS HAD RECORDED  
MORE THAN 100 SONGS,

MANY OF WHICH WOULD  
BE RE-RECORDED FOR GENERATIONS

BY OTHER ARTISTS AS PROOF

THAT THEY WERE STAYING TRUE  
TO THE MUSIC'S ROOTS.

MAN: JIMMIE RODGERS  
STARTED IT ALL.

WITHOUT JIMMIE RODGERS,  
THERE WOULD BE NO BOB WILLS.

WITHOUT JIMMIE RODGERS,  
THERE WOULD BE

NO HANK WILLIAMS.

WITHOUT JIMMIE RODGERS,  
THERE WOULD—WHO KNOWS?

HE WAS IT.

HIS SONGS NEVER GO AWAY,

GENERATION AFTER GENERATION.

BOB DYLAN HAS RECORDED THEM;  
WAYLON RECORDED THEM.

JOHNNY CASH RECORDED THEM...

DOLLY PARTON.

EVERYBODY THAT IS ANYBODY HAS  
RECORDED A JIMMIE RODGERS SONG.

THE SONGS KEEP COMING AT YOU.

RODGERS:  
"THE MISSISSIPPI AND YOU..."

HAGGARD: HE SET THE PACE  
FOR PEOPLE LIKE ERNEST TUBB

AND PEOPLE  
LIKE HANK WILLIAMS,

PEOPLE LIKE ME,

AND, UH, JUST  
A WHOLE BIG SECTION

OF COUNTRY MUSIC  
WOULDN'T BE HERE

IF IT HADN'T BEEN  
FOR JIMMIE RODGERS.

RODGERS:  
"THE MISSISSIPPI AND YOU..."

NARRATOR:  
IN THE YEARS THAT FOLLOWED,

THE MUSIC THAT JIMMIE RODGERS,  
THE CARTER FAMILY,

AND OTHERS HAD MADE  
WOULD CONTINUE TO EVOLVE,

CONTINUE TO WELCOME  
NEW MUSICIANS AND STYLES,

CONTINUE TO GROW AS AN INDUSTRY,

AND CONTINUE TO REFLECT  
THE EXPERIENCES

OF EVERYDAY AMERICANS,

ESPECIALLY DURING

THE HARD TIMES AHEAD.

[RODGERS YODELING]

â MISSISSIPPI

â AND YOU

[DOLLY PARTON SINGING  
"MULE SKINNER BLUES"]

â WELL, GOOD MORNING

â CAPTAIN

â GOOD MORNING TO YOU, SIR

â HEY, HEY

â YEAH

â DO YOU NEED  
ANOTHER MULE SKINNER â

â DOWN ON YOUR NEW MUD RUN?

â HEY, HEY

â YEAH

â YODEL-A-HEE

â HEE-HEE

â HEE-HEE-HEE-HEE-HEE-HEE

[WHISTLES]

[WHIP CRACKS]

â WELL, I'M A LADY  
MULE SKINNER â

â FROM DOWN OLD TENNESSEE WAY

â HEY, HEY

NARRATOR: NEXT TIME  
ON "COUNTRY MUSIC"...

MAN: I THINK HARD TIMES  
AND COUNTRY MUSIC WERE BORN  
FOR EACH OTHER.

NARRATOR: A TROUBLED NATION  
TURNS TO THE RADIO...

MAN 2: THE MUSIC JUST PROVIDED  
ENCOURAGEMENT TO PEOPLE

TO GAIN ASSURANCE FOR  
A BRIGHTER DAY BEYOND  
THIS WORLD.

NARRATOR: BOB WILLIS  
SHAKES UP THE STAGE...

MAN 3: BOB WILLIS WAS  
LIKE ELVIS PRESLEY.  
HE WAS OUTRAGEOUS.

NARRATOR: AND THE WAR BRINGS  
A NEW AUDIENCE TO COUNTRY.

MAN 4: WORLD WAR II  
NATIONALIZED COUNTRY MUSIC.

NARRATOR: WHEN "COUNTRY MUSIC"  
CONTINUES.

[FIDDLE PLAYING COUNTRY MUSIC]

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OF COUNTRY MUSIC,

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âââ HEE-HEE

âââ HEE-HEE-HEE-HEE-HEE-HEE

[WHISTLES, WHIP CRACKS]

WHOO!

â WELL, I'VE BEEN WORKING  
DOWN IN GEORGIA â

â AT A GREASY SPOON CAFE

â HEY

â I'VE BEEN WORKING IN GEORGIA

â JUST TO LET A NO-GOOD MAN

â CALL EVERY CENT OF MY PAY

â HEY, HEY

â AND I'M SICK OF IT,  
I WANT TO BE A MULE SKINNER â

â YODEL-A-EE

â HEE-HEE

â HEE-HEE-HEE-HEE-HEE-HEE

â MULE SKINNER BLUES

[WHISTLES]

HYAH! HYAH...